GRAND ADVENTURE

STORIES for BOYS

After breakfast Tom strolled out to see if he could see anything of his young friend.

Dermot was just crossing the cantonments towards the colonel's bungalow when he caught sight of old Tom, whom he hailed with a merry shout. A *sais* came out of the compound and led away the boy's pony, and the two went off together.

" Have a nice ride this morning, Master Dermot? " queried the soldier.

" Fine, thank you, Edgley. But it's a shame that I'm never allowed to go across the river. It would be grand galloping out across those great big plains."

" Aye, and a fine chance, too, for them great big hairy Afghans to carry off another bright little British boy. They've had one or two already; and don't you never forget that, Master Dermot."

" Pooh! they'd never catch me on Starlight," laughed the boy.

" Don't you be too sure, sonny. Them Afghans can bite like wolves, and what's more, they can run like wolves as well."

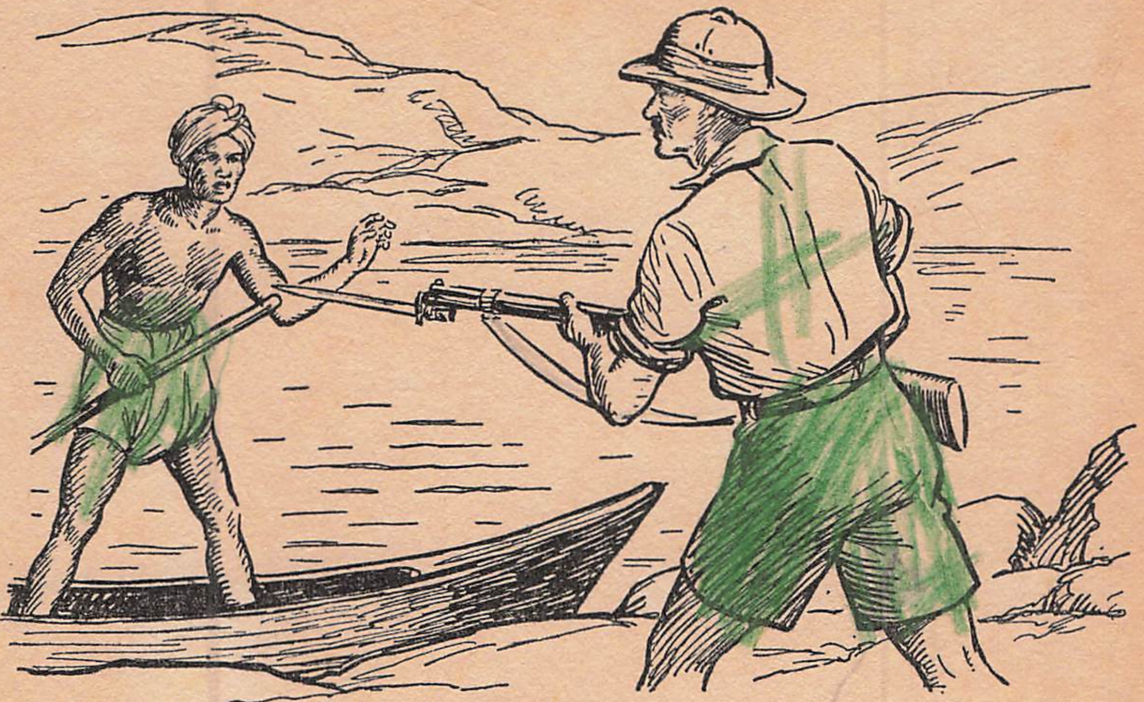
" But supposing I did go and wasn't caught, where would be the harm then? " persisted the youngster.

" Now you listen to me, Master Dermot," answered Edgley, wagging a portentous forefinger. " I've warned you agin the dangers, and the colonel himself has ordered you not to go anigh the river. You've no cause to heed what I say, perhaps; but you've got to obey your father's orders—we all have to do that, or else there's punishment; but even punishment ain't nothin' 'long side of the disgrace of bad discipline; because, you see, good discipline is the whole secret of why British soldiers always win their battles."

Dermot thought hard for a minute. He wanted very much to ask a question, but did not know how to put it without hurting his friend's feelings. At last he blurted it out, with a small hand laid upon the old soldier's arm.

" Edgley," he said, " if it is right to always obey orders, how is it that you sometimes do wrong and have to go before father and get punished? "

Tom tilted his sun-helmet forward and scratched the back of his head reflectively. This was an unexpected poser.



TOM THREW UP HIS RIFLE

" Well, you see, Master Dermot," he said at last and rather lamely, " it's all on account of my never having had no eddication, so to speak. If you're born to be an officer and go to a big public school you learn what's proper an' what ain't, right from the very start and you never forgets it afterwards. But the likes o' me never used to get no schoolin', so long as we could dodge the school inspectors; an' so we never got no notion of the right spirit, 'till we came to the Service and learned the meanin' of standin' by yore pals, an' on no account never lettin' the Regiment down. An' what you learns late you're apt to forget early, so that's how it is that I sometimes goes off the rails an' comes on the books, an' there you are."

After which lengthy explanation Private Thomas Edgley cleared his throat noisily, wiped the sweat from his streaming brow with the back of his horny hand, and looked dubiously at his young friend.

" Thank you, Edgley, I think I understand," answered the child.

" Of course you understand, Master Dermot. Wasn't you just born to be an officer and a gentleman? You don't need to take no heed o' the doin's of a common old soldier like me."

" But I do take notice of what you do, Edgley. I think you're a splendid soldier, besides you're one of daddy's ' Old Contemptibles.'

Daddy says you're a Mons hero, and he's often told me that you ought to have got a V.C. instead of a D.C.M."

A rare smile lit up the old fellow's features as he looked at the little boy.

" Well, look here then, Master Dermot," he said quietly, " if you feel that way about things we'll make a little bargain with each other I'll promise to keep off the books in future, if you'll promise not to go anywhere near the river. You'll be goin' home to England soon, to get yore schoolin', an' some day you'll come back to India, in command of the old regiment, like as not. I'll not live to see it, for I'm time-expired next month, but we can't afford to give them Afghans the chance of finishin' off our future commandin' officer, can we? Now then, Master Dermot, is it a bargain? "

" It's a bargain, Edgley," said the child solemnly, and held out his hard little hand, which was at once engulfed in the old soldier's great paw.

For a week Tom Edgley's conduct was, in military parlance, exemplary, and for a week little Dermot forgot all about his burning desire to ford the river and gallop free across the Afghan plains.

Then came a day when one of the children they make sergeants now-a-days, and leave waiting round the corner watching for their commissions, saw fit to check Edgley for a speck of dust in a rifle barrel that was spotless. Tom, strongly conscious of his own rectitude, answered sharply that when Sergeant Sidley was soldier enough to clean the muck out of his eyes before he went on company parade of a morning, he might be able to recognise a well-kept rifle when he saw one.

After that the sergeant, who had seen no active service, and hated the much be-ribboned old soldier, had whipped Tom on the peg, by falling in a file of men and ordering them to march him to the guard-room.

When Colonel Layton read the charge sheet, and saw that Edgley was accused of being dirty on parade, he opened his eyes, but the further charge of " using threatening language to his superior officer " brought an understanding smile to the C.O.'s lips.

" I do not believe that you are guilty of being dirty on parade," he said to Edgley, when the old soldier, under escort and bare-headed, stood before him in the Orderly Room, " nor do I altogether believe that you threatened Sergeant Sidley, but I do believe that you answered him back in an insolent manner. That sort of thing cannot be permitted in any circumstances, and you will, therefore, take two hours' pack drill as a punishment."

Edgley did his two hours " can and kit " with black rage burning in his heart, and no man was ever nearer to his death than was Sergeant Sidley when he came and grinned at the old soldier, as he tramped up and down the barrack square under the hot Indian sun in full marching order.

When the defaulters were dismissed Edgley dropped his pack on his cot with a thud and slapped his rifle into the arms rack with an angry rattle.

He left the canteen and stood to attention as the bugles sounded " Retreat " at sunset. Then he went off to find Sidley. The search was not a long one, for he ran right into the Sergeant coming away from the married lines.

" Take off your tunic, sergeant, so that I can't see your stripes," he greeted him, " for, as man to man and to your face, I'm goin' to tell you that you're a herrin'-gutted, white-livered liar. An' that I hope, will make you put your fists up, for, if you won't, by the Mother of Moses I'll smash you where you stand."

Sergeant Sidley felt frantically for his whistle and had almost got it to his lips when Edgley's iron fist took him neatly on the point of the jaw, stretching him unconscious on the ground.

Thereafter the old soldier walked back to the barrack-room and sat quietly down for the guard to come and take him to the guard-room. He was a little dazed at present; but one thing stood out clearly in his mind. He was not, as yet, time-expired, he had struck his superior officer without provocation, and the punishment for that offence was penal servitude. It did not look as if he would go home in the same ship with Dermot after all. For the first time he remembered the solemn promise he had made to the child, and his mind became troubled.

He suffered arrest without resistance but, as he sat in his cell, he was not looking forward to his interview with the C.O. next morning; or to the court-martial which must inevitably follow.

Presently he lay down and soon fell into a heavy sleep.

The old soldier ate his breakfast in sullen silence next morning and the " Short Dress " was sounding when the orderly came back to fetch his plate and cup. Almost at the same moment a tremendous hubbub broke out in the lines, and the duty bugler on guard at once blew the " Alarm." Tom moved restlessly, and the orderly looked out through the open door to see what was happening.

" My Aunt! " he cried, " there's young Layton's pony acomin' gallopin' back across cantonments with an empty saddle. S'welp me, he couldn't ha' fallen orf; them Afghans must ha' got 'im. I seed 'im a'ridin' out towards the river soon arter dawn."

Next moment the amazed soldier staggered and fell flat on his back as the prisoner sprang past him.

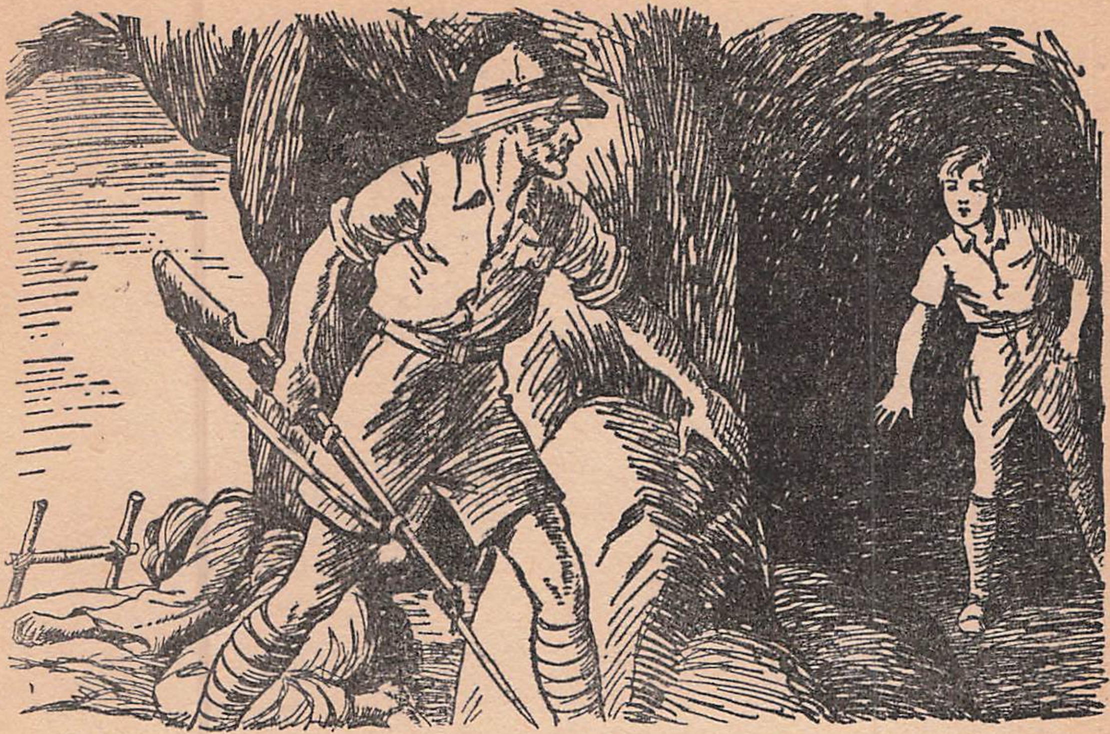
All resentment at the spite put upon him by Sergeant Sidley died out of Tom Edgley, as he crept across the passage from the cells and entered the room almost opposite. In his brain was one single blazing thought, he had broken his pact with Dermot, and the child had gone down to the river.

As he expected, the Quarter Guard had already turned out and the guard-room was empty. Empty, at least, of men; what he required he found in the arms rack—a spare Mark I Lee-Enfield rifle, with a bayonet already fixed. Tom took up the weapon, pressed a charger of cartridges into the magazine, stuffed half-a-dozen more clips into his trouser pockets and slipped out through the back-window, minus tunic but wearing his sun-helmet.

A quick reconnaissance round the corner of the building showed him a number of platoons, under their own subalterns, moving at the double out along the road to the river. The colonel, second-in-command, adjutant and mounted company officers had already galloped on ahead.

Edgley saw the futility of trying the road, besides he knew a shorter path through the jungle close at hand.

When he came to the river he was a mile west of the ford, and



THEN HE WENT INTO THE CAVE

had just made up his mind to swim for it, taking with him the bayonet as his only weapon, when a native came in sight lazily poling a fishing boat.

Tom threw up the rifle and covered him.

" *Idderao!* " he commanded sharply, and the native, seeing the set look on the white man's face, stood not upon the order of his coming.

Ten minutes later Edgley landed upon the Afghan shore. He could see mounted men racing far ahead towards the hills and, nearer at hand, the Regiment spread out in skirmishing order and advancing more slowly as they searched every inch of ground for young Dermot. Occasionally he heard the crack of a rifle.

" If he's fallen off, they'll find him," thought Edgley; " if the Afghans have got him, then my place is over there up in the hills. With so many folks after them there's always the chance them hairy *hubshis* will altogether overlook me."

He dropped unobtrusively into a deep nullah, and followed its tortuous course across the plains. Once he heard sounds ahead, and went to earth with remarkable quickness. Thereafter he lay still with his finger itching on the trigger, as the flanking party of hillmen poured a hot enfilade fire into an unsuspicious patrol of the Old Regiment. But he smiled with grim satisfaction as the boys cleared the position at the point of the bayonet.

Then he went forward alone; until, at last, he reached the foothills and began to climb upwards. Hour after hour he toiled on under the blazing sun; until, faint for want of food and water he was forced to rest. As soon, however, as the darkness came he spotted a betraying watch-fire which revealed the raiders' camp in a narrow gut of the hills.

He crowned the heights above the ravine and, by a miracle, climbed down safely and undiscovered in abysmal darkness.

The Afghans were stretched round their camp-fire, laughing and talking and, evidently, highly delighted with their day's work. Tom lay down to watch, for he understood no word of Pushtu and knew, therefore, that it would be of no use for him to listen to their conversation.

Presently one of the men rose with a platter of food in his hand, and went up the ravine to a small cave high up in the cliff-face, reached only by means of a rickety bamboo ladder. The old soldier dogged the man like his own shadow, but allowed him to leave the ladder before he himself began to climb it. But, first, he slipped the scabbard from his fixed bayonet and threw it away. On the ledge he waited until the sound of soft foot-falls warned him that the man was returning.

It was a tense moment. Should any gleam of starlight flash back from the bayonet the man would be warned, and would, undoubtedly, dash back and kill young Dermot, always supposing that the boy was imprisoned in the cave; or, should Tom fail to despatch the Afghan at the first thrust, the alarm would be raised and the men waiting below would come to their comrade's aid, and there would be a quick finish for Tom Edgley.

A big form loomed like a black shadow against the shadowy whiteness of the cliff. Tom lunged forward with a long reach, a double twist and a slow recover, and the Afghan dropped with a sobbing, tearing grunt.

Tom relieved the dead man of his now bloody postheen, for the night was cold, and he coveted the warmth of the thick, wadded, sheep-skin coat. Then he went into the cave, calling softly " Master Dermot, Master Dermot, are ye there? "

A half-hysterical cry of surprised gladness came back to him, and he went forward with arms held open. For a moment the much tried and sorely frightened little boy sobbed against his shoulder, and then Tom patted him gently on the cheek.

" Hold up, my son, hold up," he said, " that's not the way for our *chota sahib bahadur* to take his troubles. Come, tell old Tom what on earth possessed you to cross the river, clean in face of my warning and the Colonel's regulations? "

" Oh, Tom, I was so miserable because you were in trouble yesterday, but Daddy said I need not mind about that, because he did not believe half, nor a quarter, of what Sergeant Sidley had told him, and had only had to punish you because you stuck up for yourself."

" Did the Colonel say that? Ayah, but haven't I been the very pick of all prize fools this time? "

" So I wasn't miserable about that any more," the child continued, not heeding Edgley's interruption. " But this morning when I went into Daddy's room for *chota hazri*, I heard mother saying that you had half-killed Sergeant Sidley, and then she asked what was going to happen to you."

" Well, and what did the Colonel say to that, Master Dermot? " asked Edgley.

The boy would not answer for some time because of the pain he feared to inflict upon his old friend. At last, however, it all came out with a rush.

" Daddy said that we are always on active service up here on the frontier, and that you might be shot, but he thought the court-martial would only have you drummed out of the service and your medals taken away. After that it didn't seem to me to matter what happened, and I'd always wanted to come across the river, so I came, just to try and forget all about it. Then Starlight put his foot in a hole and threw me. When I got up again the Afghans were all round me, looking at me, and laughing when I ordered them to take me home.

" But now that you've come and rescued me, Edgley, perhaps they won't think any more about Sidley's broken jaw, and you'll be let off."

" Did I break his jaw, then? " queried old Edgley, with a forced, but half-satisfied chuckle.

" Edgley, where is Daddy, and where's the Regiment? " asked the child. " I told the Afghans my Regiment would come to rescue me. Can't we go down to them now? "

Old Edgley rubbed his scrubby chin reflectively.

" Well, you see, Master Dermot, the Regiment ain't here, yet. I came on a bit ahead by myself, so to speak."

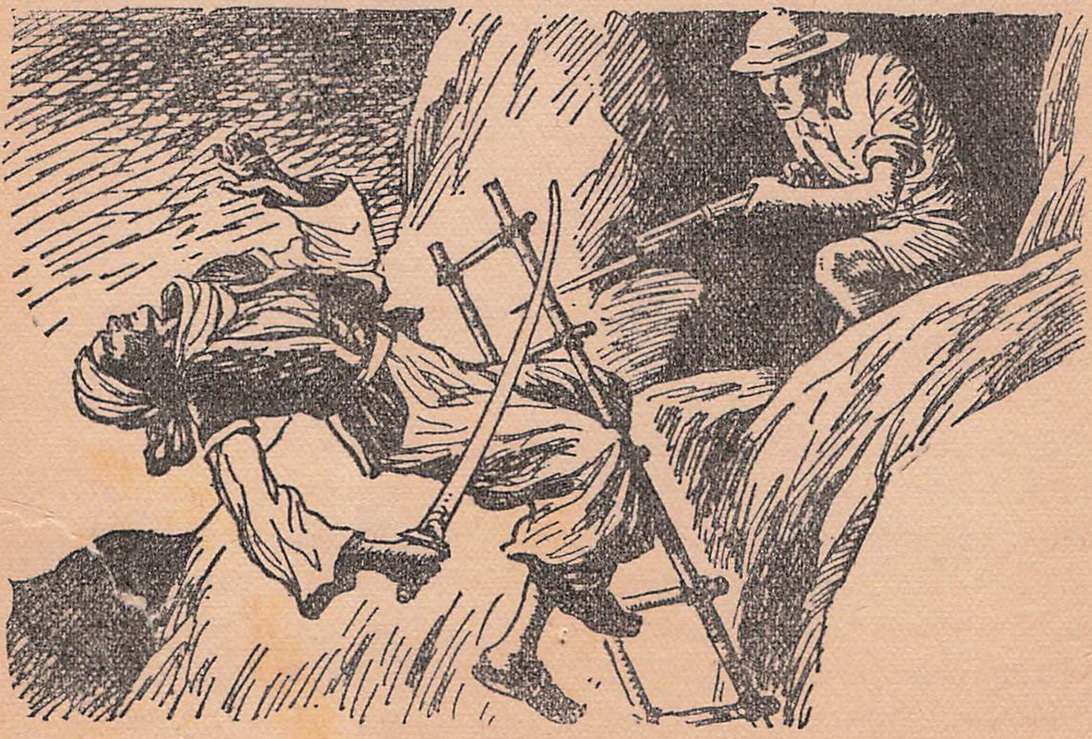
" But the Afghans will kill you, Edgley. There was one of them here only a few minutes ago. Didn't you see him? "

" I did, Master Dermot. That one won't do much more killing."

" You mean that you have killed him? "

" Well, as to that, I'm afraid I have," he answered apologetically.

Before Dermot could ask any more questions there came a sudden interruption.



HE FELL BACKWARDS WITH A CRASH

" Yar Khan! ohé, Yar Khan! " a voice called from below and old Edgley crept quickly back to the rock ledge.

Already someone was climbing up the rickety ladder. The moment the man's head came into sight against the fire-light, the point of the soldier's bayonet took him neatly in the throat, and he fell backwards with a crash, dragging the ladder with him.

Edgley drew Yar Khan's long knife and placed it in his hand, and then he pitched the body over to join that of the dead man lying below.

" Please the Lord, the others'll think those two have fought," he muttered, as he lay down to watch.

Night was falling once more. All day long old Edgley had lain on the ledge, keeping the ravine almost clear with his deadly marksmanship, and more than once, with butt, bayonet and bullet, repelling repeated attempts to carry his position by storm. Rocks had been hurled down from above, bullets had whistled up at him from beneath; but, through it all, he had seemed to bear a charmed life. Now his last cartridge but one—that he was keeping for little Dermot at the end—was expended, and the Afghans, realising this, were making fresh ladders right beneath his eyes. Worse still, others were creeping nearer, some bearing dry kindling and wood, and others great armfuls of wet grass.

" Lord, they're going to smoke us out," he groaned.

Presently the pungent smoke belched upwards in a stifling cloud and a breeze, blowing up the ravine, drove it straight into the opening of the cave. Edgley staggered back, choking and half-blinded. At the same instant the Afghans, bearing four storming ladders, came on with furious yells.

In grim silence he stood to meet them; but, so narrow was the passage, no more than two of them could come at him at once. In that hour bayonet answered tulwar, axe and knife, but so close was the press and so great the eagerness of the Afghans that none of them tried to finish him with jezail or pistol bullet.

Back and farther back they drove him, fighting grimly like some old grey wolf defending its lair. The stars peeped out in the open sky and the end was very near, when a bugle spoke and a ringing British cheer told that relief was coming.

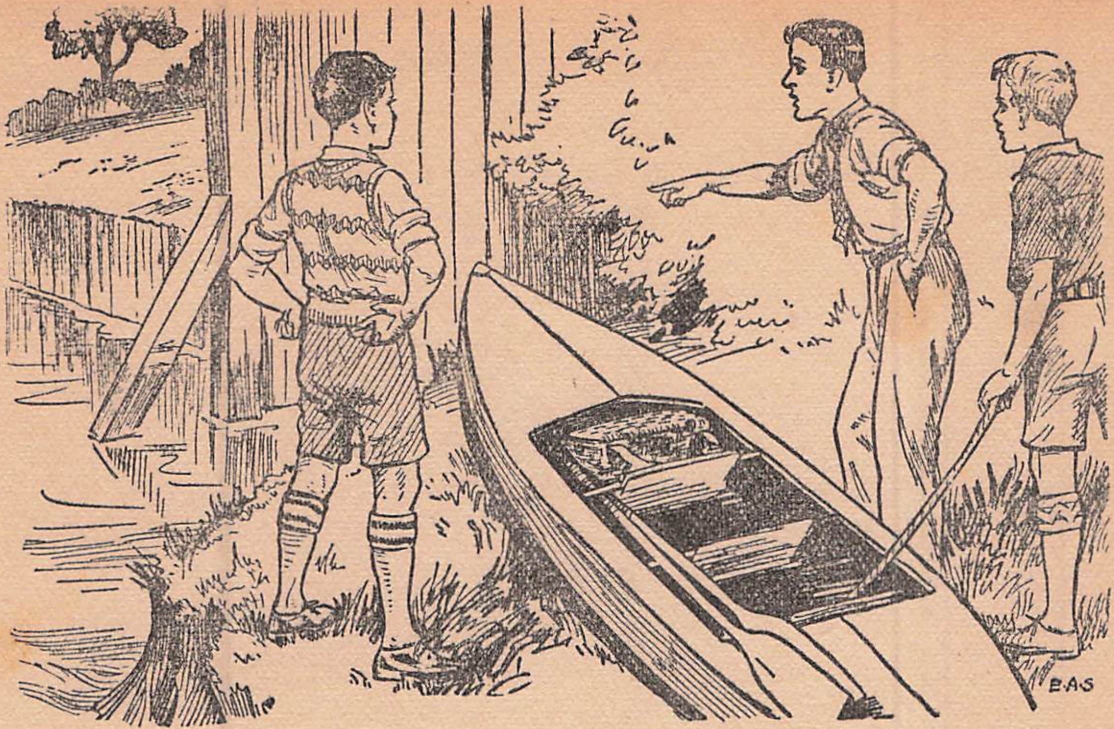
Some answering madness stirred in Edgley's blood. This was his last fight, and, by gad, it should be his best.

He was weary from watching and almost spent with plying his bayonet, and yet, with a great shout, he sprang forward, stabbing and stabbing again, kicking and smashing grinning faces out of all semblance of humanity with the dripping butt of his rifle, until at last he had fought his way clear to the ledge and his wondering comrades saw him, a terrible, blood-stained figure, lit up for an instant by the leaping flames from where the fire beneath had cleared.

Then a pistol cracked and the ' old sweat ' sagged slowly to his knees, sank forward on his face and so, lay still.

A wounded Afghan he had struck down and passed over in the passage to the cave had rallied and shot him in the back.

Private Thomas Edgley, old soldier, was time-expired indeed, his problem of how to go on living in " Hawful Hengland as a beastly civilian " solved, as he would have wished to solve it, and by his dead body Colonel Layton, the man who had understood him, and little Dermot, the child who had loved him, came to each other's arms.



A FIGHT FOR LIFE

CLIVE CARTER, poring over a guide book, sauntered back from the village post office to the riverside bungalow garden where his two brothers were busy preparing a collapsible boat for launching.

" The guidebook says there's jolly good fishing to be had at Tipmouth," he told them, " but it's five miles from here and the river is too shallow for boating in some parts on the way down. Perhaps we'd better go by train or bus and take the boat packed up."

" After getting it all put together! Not likely! " came in a protesting howl from Sidney.

" Besides," added Donovan the eldest of the three, " at that rate we should be spending some of our profits and we shouldn't get half the boating we've planned. No, let's push off and just do a portage at any part that isn't navigable. We can manage it easily enough with a boat like this one and a bit of exploring on the way will make all the more fun."

" It *mightn't*—if our exploring takes us on private ground," grinned Clive, " but I'm game to chance it if you two are, so I'll go on swottin' information till you're ready."

"We're ready *now*, so you can shove the book away and hop in to steer," Donovan told him. "So long as we know enough to get us down to Tipmouth, that's all that matters. We can find out any thing else for ourselves."

"Right-ho!" Clive tossed the guidebook among a heap of fishing tackle, only too glad to be spared any more research, and within a couple of minutes more the three boys were out in midstream, finding their work light on the out-going current of the tidal river.

But a receding tide made difficulties in other ways. Through the water being more shallow, parts were rendered unnavigable which at high tide would have easily floated the light little craft belonging to the young Carters.

"Whew! we must look out the boat doesn't get damaged, suddenly grounding like this," Donovan said, at the first full stop, fortunately made by a sand bar with no jagged pieces of rock or heaps of shingle obtruding to tear at the frail keel of the little lath and canvas vessel.

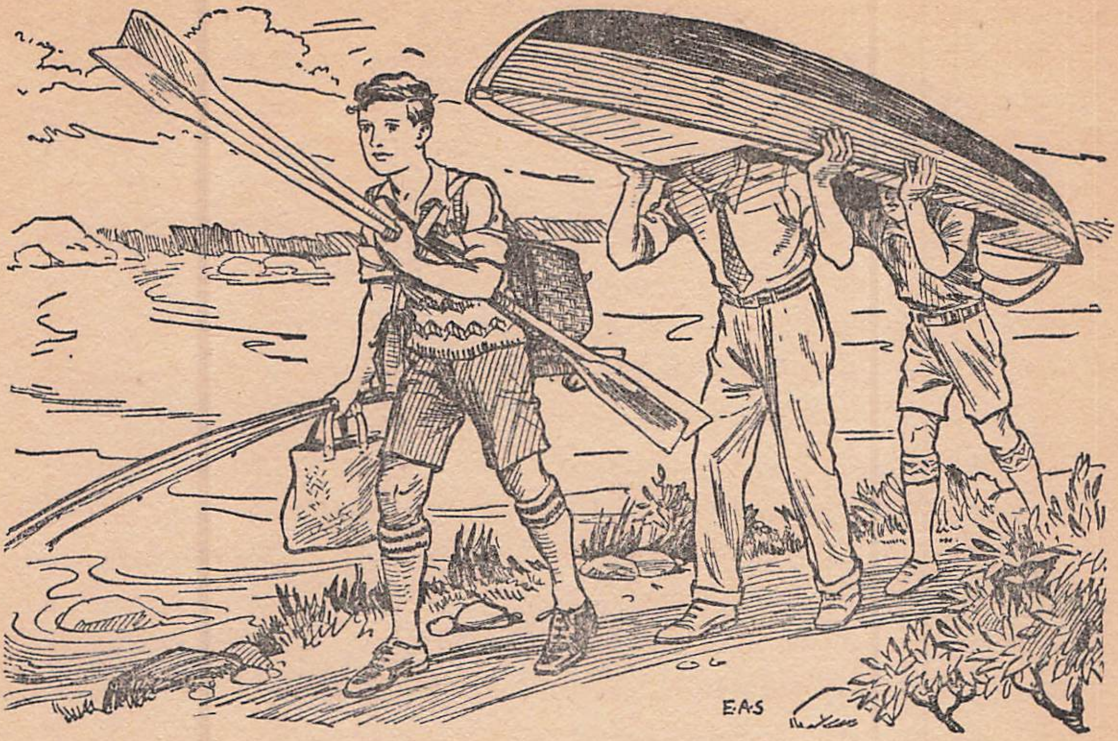
"Pop goes most of our holiday fun and Mother's outing if it does," cried Sidney. "We can't expect Dad to buy us another boat if we bust this one up on its first voyage. Come along! all hands to the job," and pushing off from the sandy obstacle, the three fishers worked their boat along towards the nearest shore, which was thickly wooded right down to the water's edge. However, a sloping path promised a possible portage, even if rather difficult going.

"Of course, we can't keep taking the boat to bits for these jaunts. It would take up too much time," Donovan decided. "Clive, can you manage the tuck, tackle and paddles if Sid and I carry the boat upside down on our heads?"

"I'll have a jolly good try," was the obliging reply, and soon Clive was leading the way, loaded like a "a pedlar johnny" as he put it, while what looked rather like a four-legged caterpillar plodded behind him.

"Looks deep enough to launch again here," he told his brothers before long, and then the easier method of travelling was resumed till the boat grounded once more.

Portage had to be resorted to half-a-dozen times during the five-mile journey to the river's wide mouth, so lunch and a rest were voted for unanimously before fishing began.



PORTAGE HAD TO BE RESORTED TO

The Carters found later that they had acted wisely in this respect, for once they had begun fishing, they were kept absorbingly busy at it for some hours.

" What I want to know," Clive said by and by as he dumped another catch into an almost full creel, " is how we're going to do portaging on the way back. It seems to me, Don, that you'll have to drop your notion for getting eels to-day; we're pretty loaded already."

" Can't help it," persisted Donovan. " I'm bent on getting some even if we have to hang them round our necks to get them home."

" They would be too much alive-oh to act as necklaces long," chuckled Sidney. " But I quite agree that we ought to get some; they're sure to sell well and it's trade we're after as well as home supplies."

" So we are. Go ahead, then, with the eeling. The bigger catch we get of everything the better, of course, so long as we can get back with it."

That question was left to itself for the time being, for the Carter boys were keen on carrying out a plan they had devised for giving their mother a birthday outing while on the riverside holiday, combining pleasure with business by indulging their fondness for fishing and earning enough by selling their surplus catches, to take their mother and father on a day's up-river steamer trip, to a famous old castle. They had nearly a fortnight before them in which to earn the required amount for the five steamer fares, the trip being intended as a grand wind-up to the holiday.

But that first day's fishing very nearly proved the one and only so far as the three boys were concerned, as later events were to show.

Having decided at last that they had really got as big a haul as they could hope to get home with, they packed up ready for the return and then sat in the boat refreshing themselves with flasks of tea and the remains of their food supply.

" I believe the tide is just on the turn again, so that will be a help to us," Donovan remarked contentedly, as he screwed the top on his empty flask.

" Perhaps we won't have to portage this time after all, then," was Clive's hopeful comment. " The water ought to be a lot less shallow."

" Ah, but our craft is a lot heavier and will sit a lot deeper in the water, remember, so don't raise your hopes too high, old boy," and Sidney wagged his head sagely as he uttered the warning.

" Anyhow, we may have to land less often, which will make things easier," Clive argued cheerfully as he steered skilfully out into midstream once more.

Just at first it seemed as if his hopes of a less difficult return would be fulfilled, but after a while, when the boat had drawn ahead of the advancing tide, a landing had to be effected once more. This time the boys chose the opposite bank for their portage, thinking that its woodland looked less dense to penetrate. They were soon brought up short, however, by an expanse of private lawns running down to the water's edge.

" Drat! " exclaimed Donovan vexedly. ' If it wasn't for the high fence we'd chance trespassing for once, but we can't lift all our junk over it. Oh well, we'll have to wade round this private bit, that's all."

"Too hard work," grumbled Sidney. "Besides, there's the danger of plunging into a deep part and losing our gear. I vote we land again just clear of the fence—we shouldn't do a spot of harm just walking along that path in the grounds."

His suggestion being considered a good one, the three were soon putting it into operation. But all at once a furious baying sounded and startled glances showed the intruders several big dogs making for them across the wide green space between the waterside path and the big house that could be seen at a little distance away.

"Horrors! I believe they're bloodhounds. The water! Quick! or they'll be on us!" yelled Clive, and less than a minute after his shout, he and his brothers were plunging desperately out from the shore, finding the frantic rush in their loaded state no easy matter.

Shrill whistles and bawls from behind now mingled with the noise of the dogs, and sent the three boys struggling farther out into the water.

"Stop! stop!" was the shout that soon came to their ears, the command being followed by other words which they could not distinguish.

"Not likely, to be chewed by hounds or bagged for trespassing," Donovan panted to his brothers. "Peg on! we shall soon be able to float the boat again, I think."

But before there was any chance of their doing so, the shouts of the nearing man became plainer.

"Hi! hi! Quicksands out there! Come back! come back!"

But even as the terrible significance of the words burst upon the boys, their danger became apparent to themselves. Clive, who was some yards ahead of the other two, suddenly sent up a panic-stricken cry: "Oh! oh! I'm being sucked down! Help! help!"

Donovan let his end of the boat drop with a smack and sprang to the rescue, only to be caught himself by the shifting sands. With remarkable presence of mind despite the terror in his heart, Sidney righted the boat, sprang in pushed a paddle into the sand and forced the frail craft towards his sinking brothers.

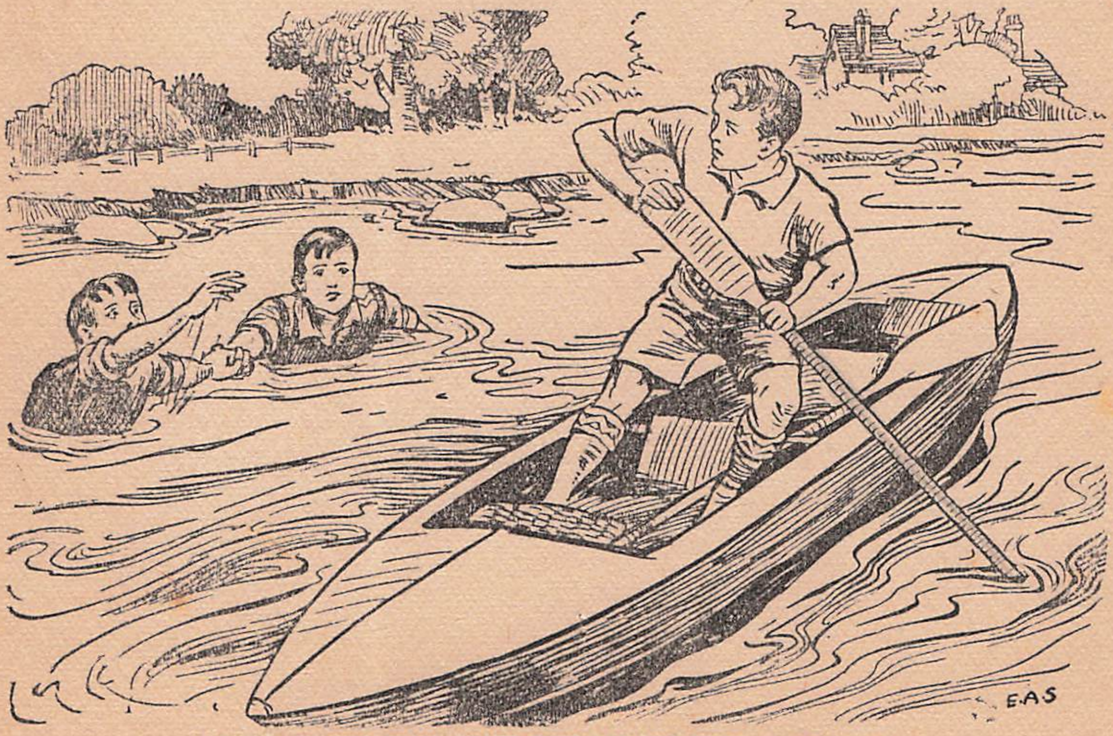
But their desperate grasp at its side was powerless against the strong suction of the sands, and it seemed as though they, the boat, and the boy inside it, who was trying so manfully to drag his brothers to safety, must soon be drawn under.

Then: " Hold on! Just another minute! I'm coming! " bellowed the voice that had tried to warn, and almost immediately a punt shot over the fast deepening water beside the boys.

" Thank Heaven the tide is coming in or I couldn't have got here in this heavy boat; and I doubt if you could have been rescued without," the man breathed thankfully after the united efforts of himself and Sidney had drawn the other two boys into the punt to safety. " I was in despair when I saw you all take to the river in spite of my shouts, but I suppose you didn't hear what I said? "

Donovan shook his head. " Not till too late, sir," he replied. " You see, we were trespassing really," and he shakily explained the reason why.

" Well, it's a mercy for you that you were, as it happened to attract my attention," their rescuer said. " If you had tried the wading stunt along here, you must all have been trapped by the shifting sands. How is it that you hadn't heard about them, I wonder? The guide



HE FORCED THE FRAIL CRAFT TOWARDS HIS SINKING BROTHERS book gives a very plain warning of the danger and I see one among the tackle in your boat there, surely."

The gaze of the three boys travelled to the sodden volume in question, and instinctively they all shivered. How little they had dreamed that the careless tossing aside of the book only partly read, might imperil their lives!

To their kindly saviour they poured out the explanation, each taking a turn in telling the tale of their money-earning fishing expedition and its object.

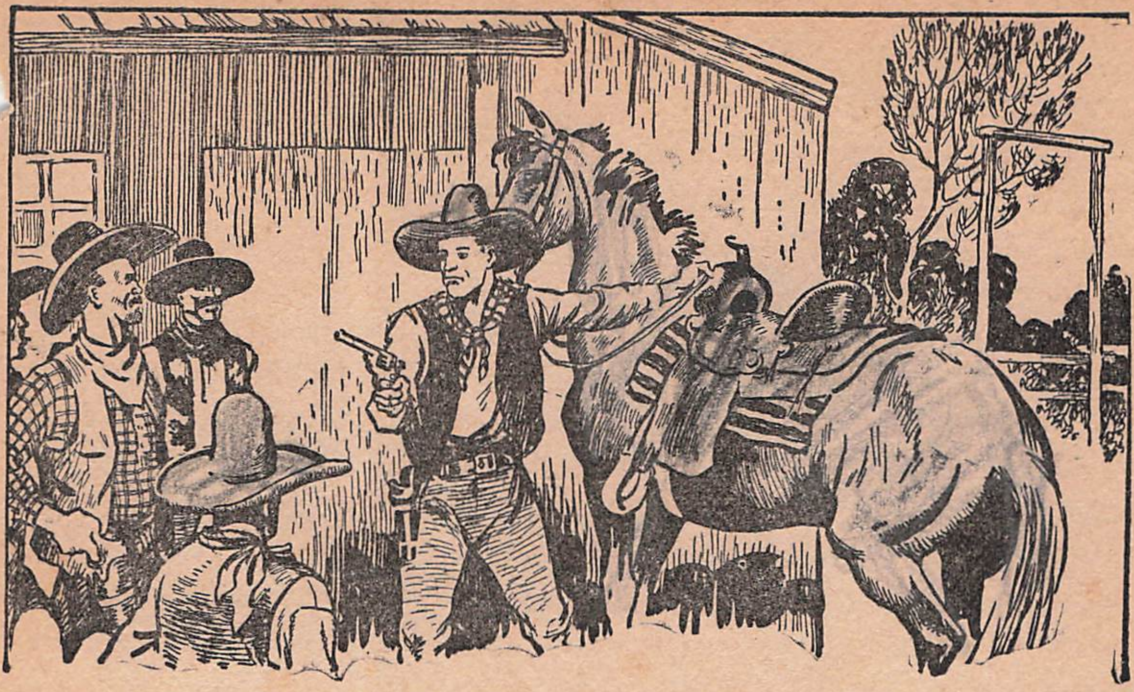
The man smiled approvingly at the earnest faces.

" You're three capital chaps to have thought of such an enjoyable plan for your mother's birthday," he told them. " I'll tell you what. You don't look fit for any more heavy portaging to-day after your scare, so let me buy your first catch. I've got a biggish staff to provide for—I run a kennel establishment here, you know—go in for training bloodhounds and all that, too—so I can do with all the fish you have there."

The boys' faces beamed as they thanked him; they certainly were feeling badly shaken up after their fright, but such an easy disposal of their fish heartened them tremendously.

" Good! then we'll land it and your boat too; then you can come up to the house with me for the cash and a feed. After that, I'll see you safely above those quicksands myself. You needn't be afraid of my dogs. They're friendly enough with anyone they know."

Before the boys resumed their journey home, they were on most friendly terms with the dogs and their owner too, a Captain Barnes, who paid them so generously for the fish that, as Donovan said, it quite made up for their shock as well.



DANGEROUS DAN

IT was in a spirit of sheer sarcasm that the cowboys of the Circle Y Ranch gave Dan Hillier the nickname of "Dangerous." He may have been a sulky-looking beggar but his speech was soft, his manner mild and he had a puzzled sort of way of appealing for help in the almost endless string of difficulties which seemed to be always entrapping him that led his new comrades to regard him as a bit of a fool.

Like Dumas' famous young musketeer, D'Artagnan, it was Dan's mount that first brought ridicule upon him, for Saul, his liver-coloured mustang, looked an even sorrier brute than the man who bestrode him when they came to the Circle Y seeking employment.

"Land's sakes, did yer ever see sich a couple o' ornery critters!" exclaimed Barney Hunt, who owned the ranch, as Dan and his mustang came ambling over the prairie. The cow-punchers who were lounging at their ease felt constrained to admit that they never had.

"Say, mister, any chance of a job?" said Dan, as he doffed his Stetson and wiped his steaming brow with the back of a horny hand.

The question came as little more than a husky whisper and it set the listeners shouting with laughter. Barney rolled the thin cigar he was smoking from one corner of his mouth to the other before he answered.

" What're yer good for, skinnin' spuds ? "

There was another hurricane of merriment, but Dan never batted an eyelid, nor did the mild expression of his dark eyes alter.

" Reckon I kin ride 'n herd with the next," he muttered in that queer, husky voice.

Barney turned away without a word of comment and then a youngster, who rather fancied himself, flung a stone at the broncho and, almost in the same movement, flipped a cigarette into his mouth ; but, quick as the boy had been, and innocent as was his expression, Dan acted with the speed of greased lightning. No one saw where his gun came from, and, mark you, there were men in that bunch who prided themselves upon their quickness on the draw, but, all the same, there was a whip-like crack and young Tom Chance's cigarette was cut cleanly in half within a hairsbreadth of his lips.

" Sufferin' snakes ! "

Old Barney wheeled like a cockchafer on a pin and his hand moved to a low-hung holster but never reached the grip of his Smith and Wesson, for he was staring death in the eye at point-blank range.

" Any other guy with fresh ideas ? " came Dan Hillier's husky whisper and, suddenly, the cowpunchers realised that he had manœuvred things in such a manner that they were all in front of him and so were covered by his gun. " Well, I guess I'll be on me way," he decided, after a moment of electrifying silence which seemed like all eternity to his audience.

Barney, despite the black muzzle that menaced him, slowly and deliberately took a fresh cigar from his pocket and lit up.

" A guy that can draw and shoot same as you do's earned a meal, I reckon," he drawled. " Hitch that pony to a post and hit the floor-boards, cowboy," he invited.

The meal that followed was eaten mainly in silence, for Dan never did like dividing his attention. At last he pushed his plate away.

" Well, what about it, Boss ? " he queried.

" You're welcome to run with my bunch," came the answer. " Same pay as th' rest 'n a rake-off on what steers you save from the rustlers."

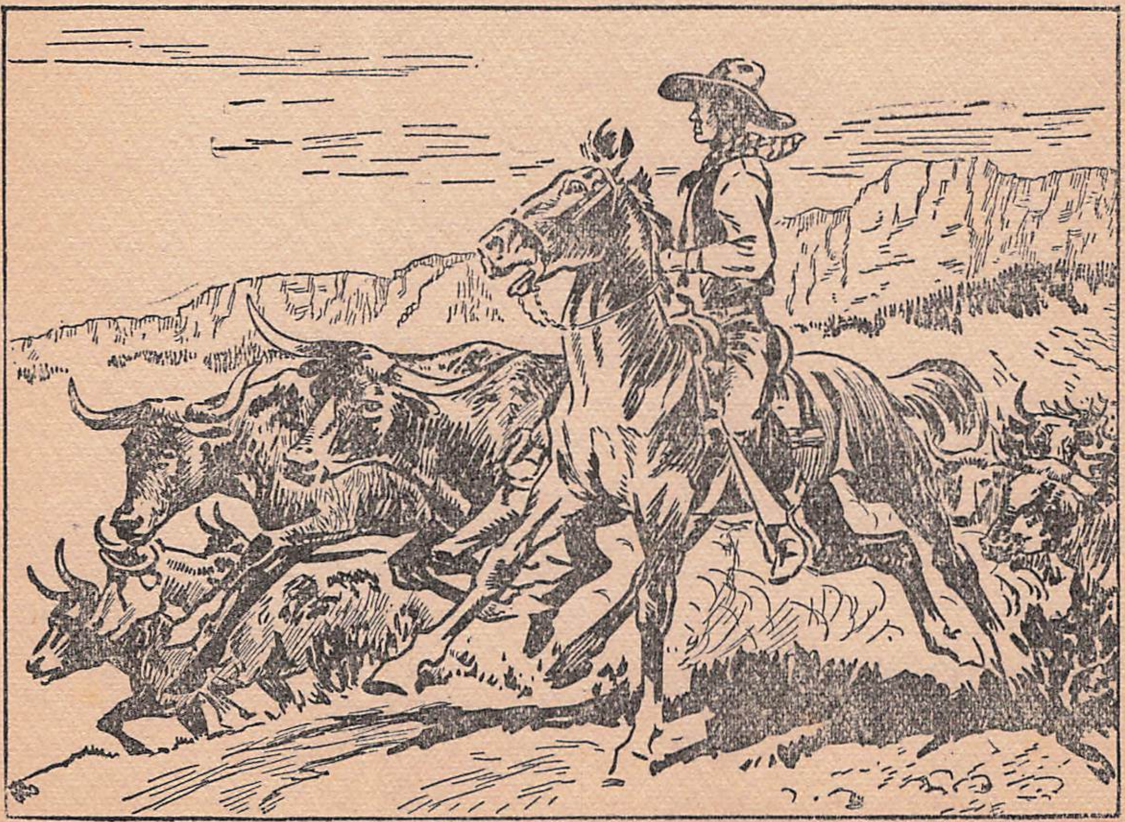
" That's O.K. by me," said Dan and slouched away to the men's quarters.

Thereafter life ran smoothly. Nobody cared very much for Dan, or perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that nobody noticed him, for there never was a man with a more uncanny knack of effacing himself. You could sit in the same room with that fellow hour after hour and believe yourself to be alone, but Dan was there just the same, and if a spot of trouble did happen to eventuate he seemed to come to life and get into action in just one slick, sleek movement.

He had none of the usual cowboy habits of wild shouting and still wilder fusilades of pistol bullets fired into the air to get the steers on the move, but whether he was patrolling the herd by night or riding the ranges by day he did his job with such amazingly quiet efficiency that no one ever knew what he was about ; but all the same, no rustler ever lifted horn or hoof when Dan was on duty.

The boss knew these things, even if the cowboys were too indolent, or too unintelligent, to appreciate the qualities of the newcomer, and for Barney Hunt a queer affection was conceived by Dangerous Dan. His other interest in life was his liver-coloured mustang Saul.

That horse was very nearly human in its dealings with Dan. He had no need of spurs or quirt and hardly ever seemed to touch his reins, just a



THAT HORSE WAS VERY NEARLY HUMAN.

pressure of the thighs, a shift of the weight in the saddle or a whispered word in that queer, husky voice and Saul would answer instantly to his master's will. And when it came to tricks, why, Saul had every other horse I have ever known or heard of clean beaten to raw frazzles.

The only boast that Dan was ever heard to utter was that there really wasn't any need for him to go out herding, because if he gave Saul his instructions the beast would do the job quite as well without a rider as with Dan on his back.

That set the cowboys laughing and chaffing Dan good-naturedly ; all, that is, except Joe Cawford, who had recently joined Circle Y.

" I reckon that Saul of yours is just an ornery *yaller* critter, Dan," he sneered.

The cow-punchers, who knew Dan's lover for his pony and remembered how he had shot the cigarette out of young Tom's mouth, sat tense ; but all that came of it was a husky question from Dan, " Heigh, Cauford, did you say ' quitter ' ? "

" You heard what I said, but have it which way you like."

Joe lounged more easily, and ostentatiously stuffed his pipe. Dan turned away and went out to his pony. " An' you're not the only one as some folks reckons is yellow, old Saul," he whispered.

Saul whinnied and shoved his nose against his master's shoulder. Then Dan swung himself up into the saddle and they were off to the little township that lay snuggled beneath the ranges.

Dan dropped into a saloon or two, made a few purchases at the local store, then tied his reins to the hitching-post outside the sheriff's office.

" Mornin', Dan," greeted Sheriff M'Guire, " what brings you to town ? "

" Oh, jes' this and that. Any addition to the population ? "

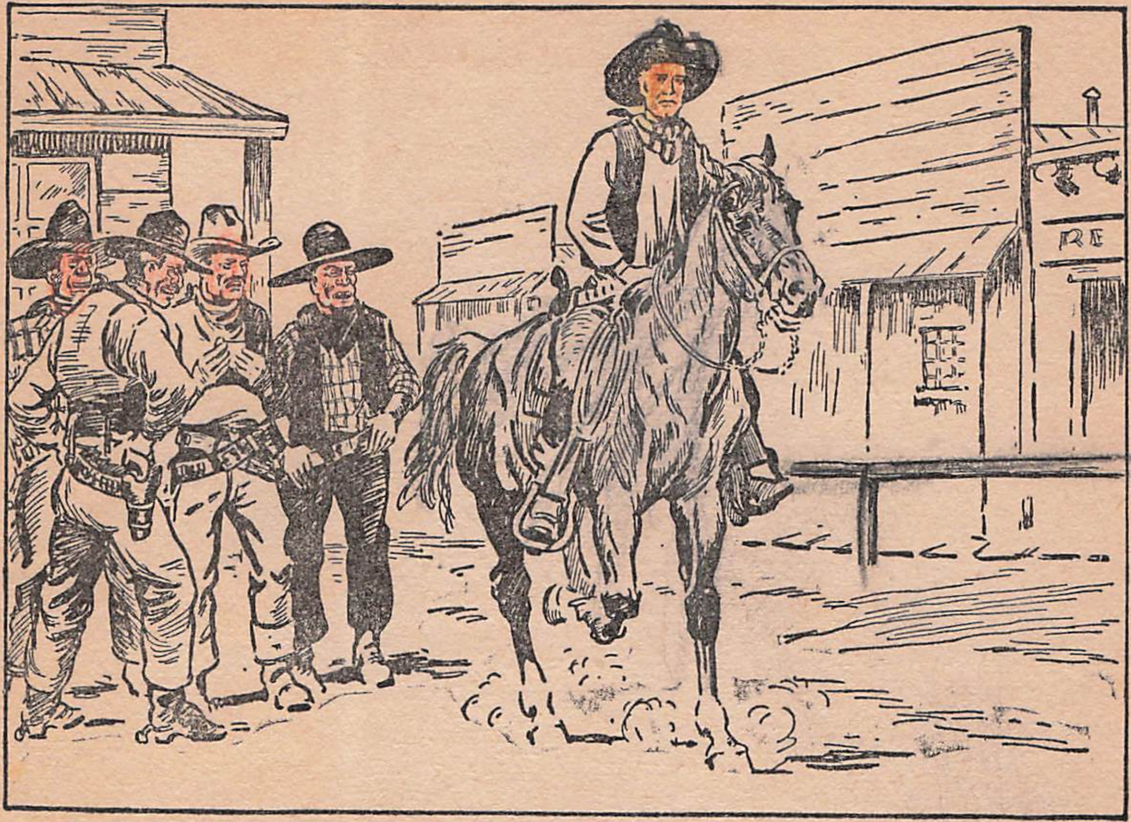
" One or two broncho-busters who'll be going out to Circle Y for the big round-up and a couple of fellows giving 'emselves out as prospectors, but what they're goin' to prospect for on the prairies fair beats me."

" Maybe they'll be trying the hills for pay-dirt."

" They'll be wasting their time in that case."

" Maybe."

Dan chose a smoke from the box on the sheriff's table, lit it and lounged towards the door. Just as he was leaving he threw a remark over his shoulder.



THEY SAW THE LOOSE-LIMBED RIDER . . . GO AMBLING BY.

" We got a new pard out at Circle Y. Name o' Cauford. S'long ! "

" Now what the deuce did he mean by that ? " mused the sheriff, as Dan shuffled out into the bright sunshine and unhitched Saul. A bunch of men leaning against the wall of the saloon laughed as they saw the loose-limbed rider and the yellow pony go ambling by. Dan neither turned his head, nor appeared to take any interest, none the less, the faces of the four men who laughed were recorded with photographic clearness upon his memory.

Upon his return to Circle Y, Dan found that his comrades had evidently been talking to the newcomer. As soon as Dan mooched into the hut Joe Cauford opened up.

" Wha's this I hear about you being good with a shooter ? ".

" No," answered Dan.

" What'd you mean, ' No, d'you admit you don't fancy yourself with a gun ? "

" No," Dan repeated aggravatingly.

Joe drew his gun like lightning, but Dan, in the doorway with his back to the light, must have moved a fraction quicker, for his gun barked and Joe's arm felt as if it had been numbed to the elbow as the revolver was shot out of its hand.

"Don't try any more tricks," advised Dan and left the hut. He found Barney eating his supper and asked to have his patrol changed, on the pretext that he'd like to get to know the new fellow. The boss was agreeable and that night Joe Cauford had Dan for company as they rode round and round the herd which was inclined to be restless. That night, too, the coyotes were even more noisy than usual.

Dan smiled knowingly and refused a drink from the bottle Joe carried. He refused also a proffered smoke and his companion was inclined to be huffy. Dan just went on smiling and there was still a full tally of the cattle in the morning.

It was a week later that someone fired at Dan from the foothills and drilled a neat hole through the high crown of his Stetson.

"Them durned prospectors, I expect," he told Joe who was riding with him, but he really held a far different view as to why he had been fired upon.

Joe was all for riding back to the ranch and turning out the boys, but Dan wouldn't hear of it, nor did he mention the matter to the boss when they met later on; but he did ask to have his patrol changed again, so that young Tom Chance was now his chum. He was a frankly decent boy, unresentful of the trick Dan had played by shooting the cigarette out of his lips and rather inclined towards hero-worship where Dan was concerned.

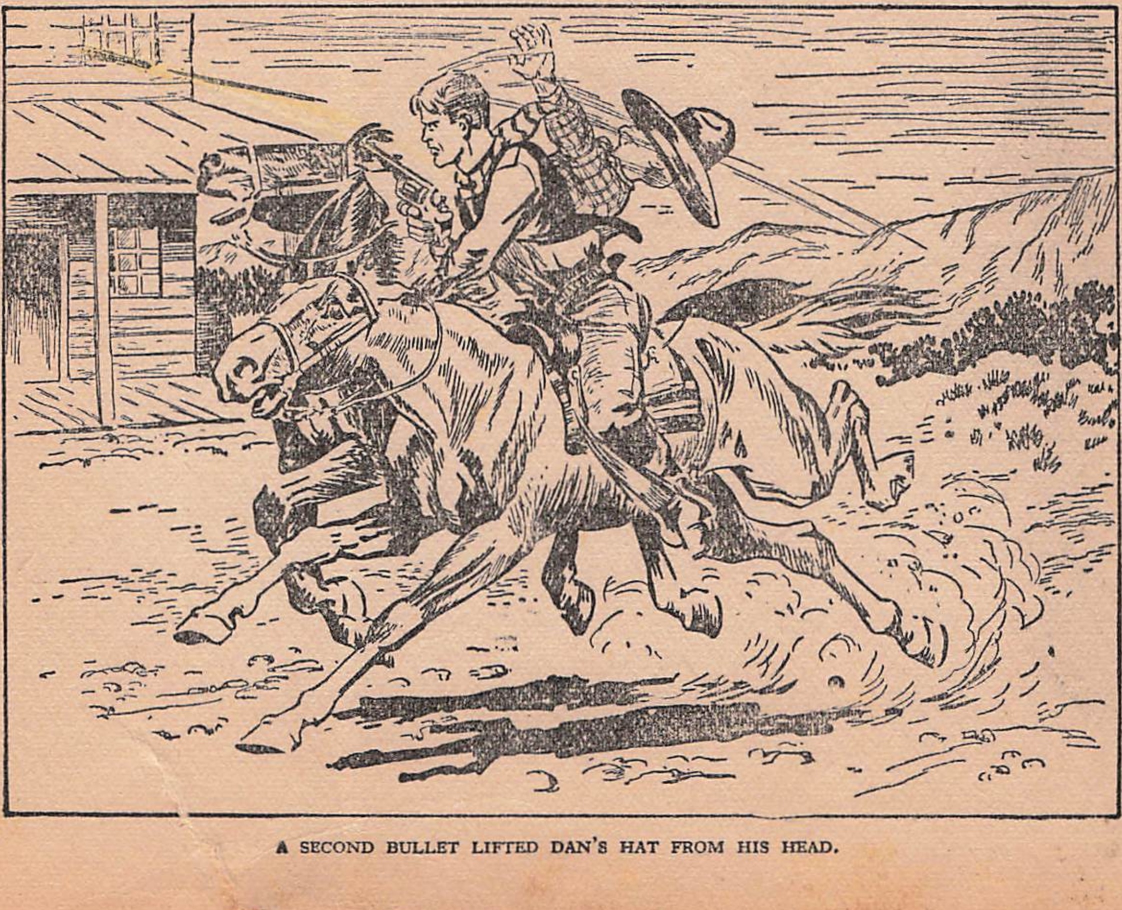
In these circumstances Dan had no difficulty in getting the youngster to agree to a certain plan, and so when two men should have been on patrol, only one remained to ride round and round the herd. An awkward situation might have risen when the relief arrived, for Dan was not yet back, but Tom said that Dan was out looking for a bunch of steers that they thought had broken away, and so the matter was passed over.

Dan, meanwhile, had reached the foothills and had hidden his yellow pony. Presently his vigil was rewarded, for the moon emerging from the clouds gave him a glimpse of a masked rider coming across the prairie. Other men, with handkerchiefs veiling the lower portion of their faces, crept out from among the foothills and a conference was held. The watcher waited until the moon was again obscured, then crept like a snake towards the jumble of rocks among which the men had gathered.

As he listened, the hair crisped at the nape of his neck, for the plan that was being outlined was big beyond his wildest imaginings. If it should come to fruition not only Barney Hunt, but two other local ranchers, looked like having the whole of their stock run off by rustlers.

Dan could not be certain, but he was pretty well sure that the masked rider was Joe Cauford. If that was the case, then the man who should have been sharing Joe's patrol must also be in the plot.

Directly the coast was clear Dan mounted Saul and, making a wide detour, rode like the wind for Circle Y. He went straight to the rancher's cabin but it was empty and the bed had not been slept in. His fears aroused, for now he did not know how many of the cow-punchers were in the plot, Dan hastened off in search of Tom. The boy was already awake and full of glee. Barney Hunt, he said, had received a message during the night summoning him to a distant town where a great rodeo was to be held, and had already started. Before leaving he had given permission for the majority of the cow-boys to follow as soon as the steers had been safely corralled, so that only a few men need stay behind to look after them.



A SECOND BULLET LIFTED DAN'S HAT FROM HIS HEAD.

That left Dan in a bigger difficulty than ever, for he well knew that once the loyal cowboys were out of the way, the rustlers would have no difficulty in running the steers right off across the border.

At that moment not another soul was awake. Silently as shadows the friends stole from the cabin to where Saul stood waiting. It took but a few minutes longer to saddle a mount for Tom, but they walked their ponies quietly until they were far enough off for there to be no chance of the thunder of galloping hooves arousing the sleeping cowboys.

None the less they were not quite out of earshot when the sound of shooting warned them that the loyal cowboys were being ruthlessly murdered. Tom would have turned back to the aid of his friends, but Dan, realising the useless folly of such a sacrifice, seized the boy's bridle and on they went to seek the aid of Sheriff M'Guire.

Presently they entered the foothills and saw the tiny township ahead, with the only passable road running straight through it. Again they heard sounds of firing. Dan dropped a hand on his comrade's arm.

" It's neck or nothing now, Tom. Remember, if either falls, the other goes on. The once chance is to reach the Rodeo. There'll be enough good fellows there to form a posse to hunt down the rustlers."

" O.K. by me, chum," grinned Tom, who was wild with excitement.

Poor Tom, that was destined to be his last ride, for a rifleman in an upper window in the township where the rustlers had made their headquarters, picked him off a moment later. A second bullet lifted Dan's hat from his head.

A husky whisper set the yellow pony going and Dangerous Dan, revolver in hand, face grim-set and body bowed forward over Saul's withers, came thundering down the sun-washed street. Bullets shrieked past him as he rode, men came tumbling out of saloons and fired as he passed, one fellow got in his path and was crashed into eternity by the impact of Saul's near shoulder. Other men were mounting their bronchoes, but onwards galloped Dangerous Dan. Never a shot fired he, but with features frozen into a mask of fate, rode for his life and the honour of Circle Y.

Then he was through and galloping hard for the place where waited those whom he knew would ride as hard as he had done to do summary justice upon the rustlers.

THE GORILLA MAN

JIM FORBES was in a bad temper. He had come up into Ruanda as professional big game hunter to Graham Dent's safari. Dent was to study the habits of gorillas for a well-known zoological society; but, from the very first, bad luck had dogged the expedition. At the moment everything was at a standstill, for the safari porters flatly refused to move a step nearer the Ruanda Mountains, nor would any of the local natives take service with the white men.

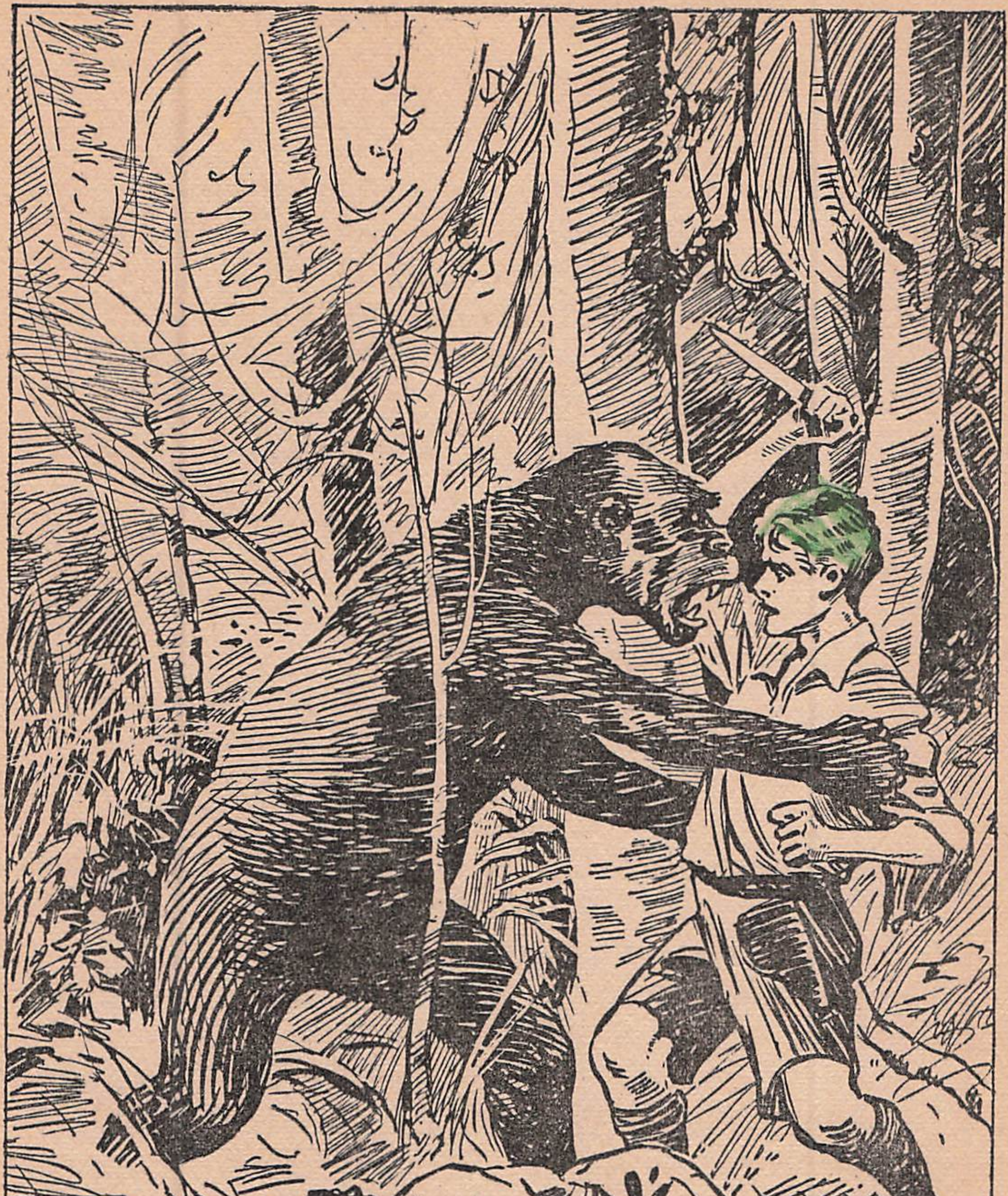
And there had been many untoward happenings. Leopards had prowled round the camp and twice men had been stolen, screaming, from their blankets. Now a new menace had been added to the expeditions' troubles.

Each evening, a hollow booming sound, like the roaring of some great *ngoma*, or native drum, echoed down from the forest-clad slopes of the mountains. As often as not that dread sound was accompanied by harsh screams. Kapamballa, Jim's old Nandi gun-bearer, declared that the gorillas of Ruanda had at last broken their old habits and had come down from the mountains, a thing which they had never done before within the memory of living man.

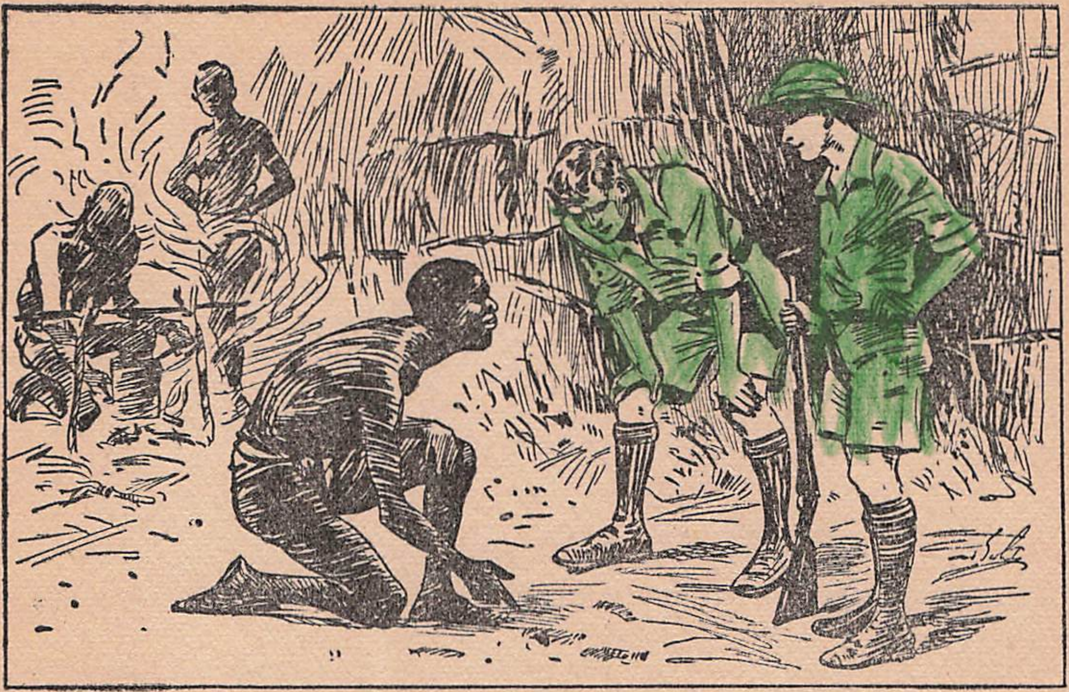
Then came a morning when the white men awakened to find that a hole had been torn in the thorn boma surrounding their camp, and that two more of their natives had disappeared. Around the fence were huge foot-prints, with the line of the tread running along the outer edge of the foot, clean across the sole, beneath the balls of the toes, and finishing off with the deep indentation of the big toe itself.

" There have been gorillas around here during the night, right enough," said Jim.

That day a number of strange natives visited the camp. They were enormous fellows, some of them standing over seven and a half feet in height, and the depth of their hairy chests was simply tremendous. On the whole, however, they seemed to be friendly disposed towards the white men, but it is hard to judge of a native's



IT LET THE LIMP BODY OF TOM FALL



AROUND THE FENCE WERE HUGE FOOT-PRINTS

real feelings. At any rate one may assume that the big men were, in reality, hostile; for next morning the white hunters awakened to find that the porters belonging to their safari had cleared out during the night.

At least, that is how things looked at first. Later in the morning Kapamballa was found, bound tightly hand and foot, and hidden away in the fringes of the forest.

" Bwana," he said, in answer to Jim's questions, " I awakened to find the porters packing their possessions very quietly. Two or three of the giant men were in the camp and I knew that their presence meant big trouble. I tried to give the alarm, but Mnyogi, the *nympara*,[1] was too quick for me. Before I could shout he hit me on the head with his *rungu*,[2] and the next thing I knew was that I was lying here in the bush, very tightly bound."

" Never mind, Kapamballa. I am sure that you did your best. What do you think all this means? "

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[1] Headman.

[2] Club.

" Bwana, it is a bad *shauri*.[1] I have seen gorillas passing through this forest, and the big natives accompanied two of them."

Jim went over to Mr. Dent's tent and repeated all that the Nandi had told him.

" As I see things," he concluded, " we should have no better chance of achieving our purpose, if we went down country and got together a fresh safari. We could get local porters to take us out of the country, but not a single one to help us go forward. On the other hand, it would be an awful pity to clear out, having come so far, especially as the forest seems to be absolutely stiff with gorillas. What do you think about it? "

" I'm not clearing out until I have made a thorough study of the habits of the Ruanda gorillas," said Graham Dent stubbornly. " I can't, in common decency, do so, on account of the zoologists at home who put up the money for this expedition."

" Very well, then," agreed Jim, " we three shall have to push on alone. Or, rather, I should say ' we four,' for I am perfectly certain that old Kapamballa will stick to us and see the safari through. We shall be able to get porters enough to accompany us down country, when the time comes."

" In that case," said Mr. Dent, " we had better make this our standing camp, and travel light and sleep rough, if we find it necessary to climb to the higher slopes of the mountains."

That night was one of sheer terror; for, although neither native nor animal showed hide or hair, the camp was completely surrounded after darkness fell; and it became impossible to distinguish between the roar of native drums and the deep booming which issued from the chests of the gorillas, as they beat upon them with their clenched fists.

At dawn Jim, accompanied by Tom Dent, Mr. Dent's son, set out to see what he could discover, concerning the things that had been going on in the fringes of the forest during the hours of darkness.

They were not very long in striking a broad trail of spoor in which the foot-prints of huge men and of even huger apes were intermingled.

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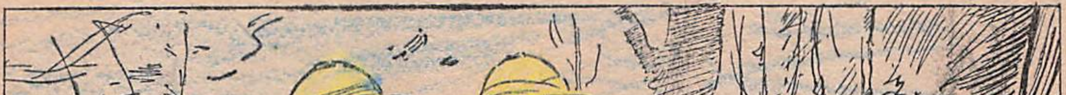
[1] Business.

"By Gad!" cried Jim, "I don't like the look of the way things are shaping; but, all the same, I am going to find out the meaning of this unnatural association between men and beasts. I reckon, Tom, that if we follow the tracks cautiously, we ought to manage to see something without being seen."

"Lead on, McDuff, I'm game," answered Tom Dent.

Very soon the open glade, in which they had been talking, gave place to a wide forest path, which, in due course, narrowed down to the ribbon of a game-track, running through dense walls of impenetrable thorn scrub, where it was impossible for the boys to walk side by side.

Jim, ever ready to accept the risks of his calling, assumed the lead. In this case, however, he was not doing his young companion any sort of kindness. From every corner of the thickets keen eyes were watching them; and, presently, heavy but silent feet came stealing in their wake. Ahead, other still forms waited in vengeful expectation. At last, when Jim had passed a big tree and Tom was looking to his right, two huge, hairy hands reached out of the



JIM ASSUMED THE LEAD

bush and seized young Dent by the throat and arm. As the boy was dragged out of the path and into the bush a crackle came from the breaking twigs.

Jim heard that sound, but made no sign that he had done so. Instead, he kept straight on round the bend of the winding track, until he was out of sight. Then, with fiercely battling arms, he fought his own way into the undergrowth, back towards the spot where he had heard the faint sound of the disturbance. One lightning glance, as he quitted the path, had warned him that his friend was not following in his footsteps.

It did not take him many minutes to find the place where the prisoner had been pulled quietly into the thick bush; but, once Tom was captured, it seemed as though his captors had abandoned all intention of hiding their tracks. Jim smiled grimly, for he realised that other foes, who would be waiting further along the path, had been equally certain of effecting his own capture.

Jim saw that he would have no difficulty in following Tom's trail. Kapamballa had taught him much forest lore and he realised at once that only one man, or beast, was carrying Tom and that the captor was, for some reason, travelling alone.

Revolver in one hand and long-bladed hunting knife in the other, Jim set out to follow the spoor. Very soon he could tell by the increasing crackle of trampled and broken undergrowth ahead that he was gaining ground. Cautious as ever, he held doggedly on, until he caught a glimpse of coarse black hair, shading to grey and heard a low moan, which broke from the lips of Tom, who was regaining the senses he had lost during the rough handling he had received when he was dragged into the bush.

At that moment Jim saw a subsidiary track, opening to the right out of the main path. Quickening his pace he dashed ahead, turned left, and forced his way towards the trail that he knew their enemy must follow.

Then a horrible caricature of humanity came into view, carrying Tom in its enormous arms. The brute turned with a half-animal, half-human snarl as Jim stepped into the main path and, at the same time it allowed its burden to sag in its hands towards the ground. Jim breathed a prayer of thankfulness, for the beast had bared its vulnerable points and there was no chance of injuring his friend when he fired.

The revolver rose slowly, until the foresight covered the brain shot, and still the great brute seemed to hesitate, as if puzzled as to what it ought to do. Its head was tilted at a queer angle, and for a second Jim wondered, subconsciously, if it was blind. Then his finger closed relentlessly upon the trigger of his weapon, but no devastating roar followed, nothing save the sharp metallic click of hammer-nose falling uselessly upon the false percussion cap of a dud cartridge. Next instant, the gorilla had knocked the revolver from the boy's grasp.

But as the brute struck, so it let the limp body of Tom fall to the ground; and Jim, game as a pebble to go down fighting, sprang, with the long knife transferred like lightning from his left hand to his right.

Again he had that curious, subconscious feeling that his opponent was either blind, or dazed and baffled, for the creature made no apparent attempt to avoid the first swinging blow of the knife, which sunk deep into its shoulder. The force of Jim's impetuous rush had carried him breast to breast with the beast, however; and, once its long arms closed about his ribs, the boy had no doubt that he was up against the steepest proposition of his adventurous lifes

For some reason the gorilla made no attempt to sink its fang. into his jugular vein, as is the habit of the brutes. Instead, it seemed content to crush and hug his body, just as a bear might do. But Jim knew the answer to that form of attack and, at the first easing off of the pressure, while his opponent drew breath preparatory to a further and more dire effort, he thrust his knee with all his might into the creature's groin. There was a howl of agony, and as the beast staggered back, Jim drove his knife blade deep down into its heart.

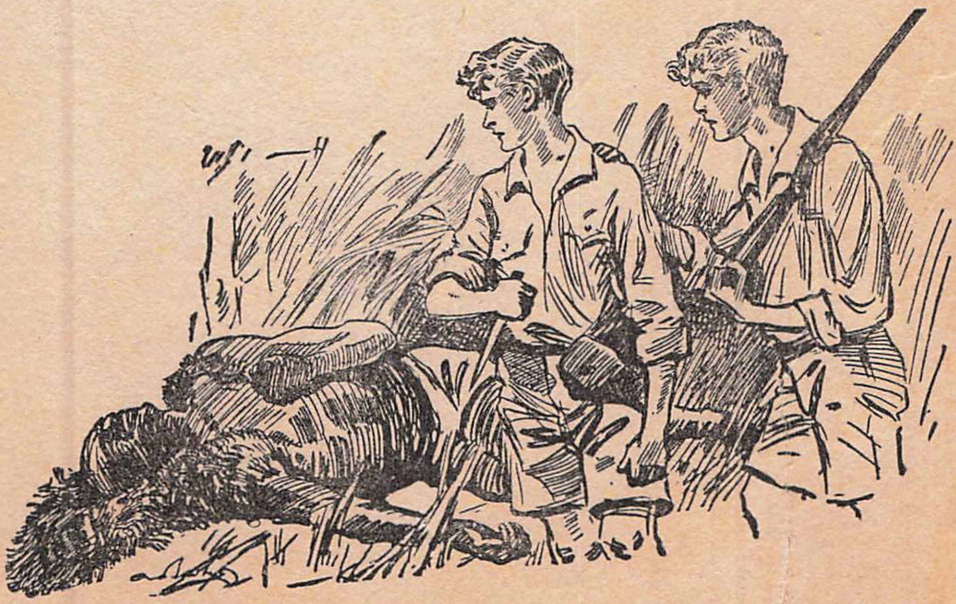
For a moment the boy leaned panting against the trunk of a tree. Then the voice of Tom brought him back to reality.

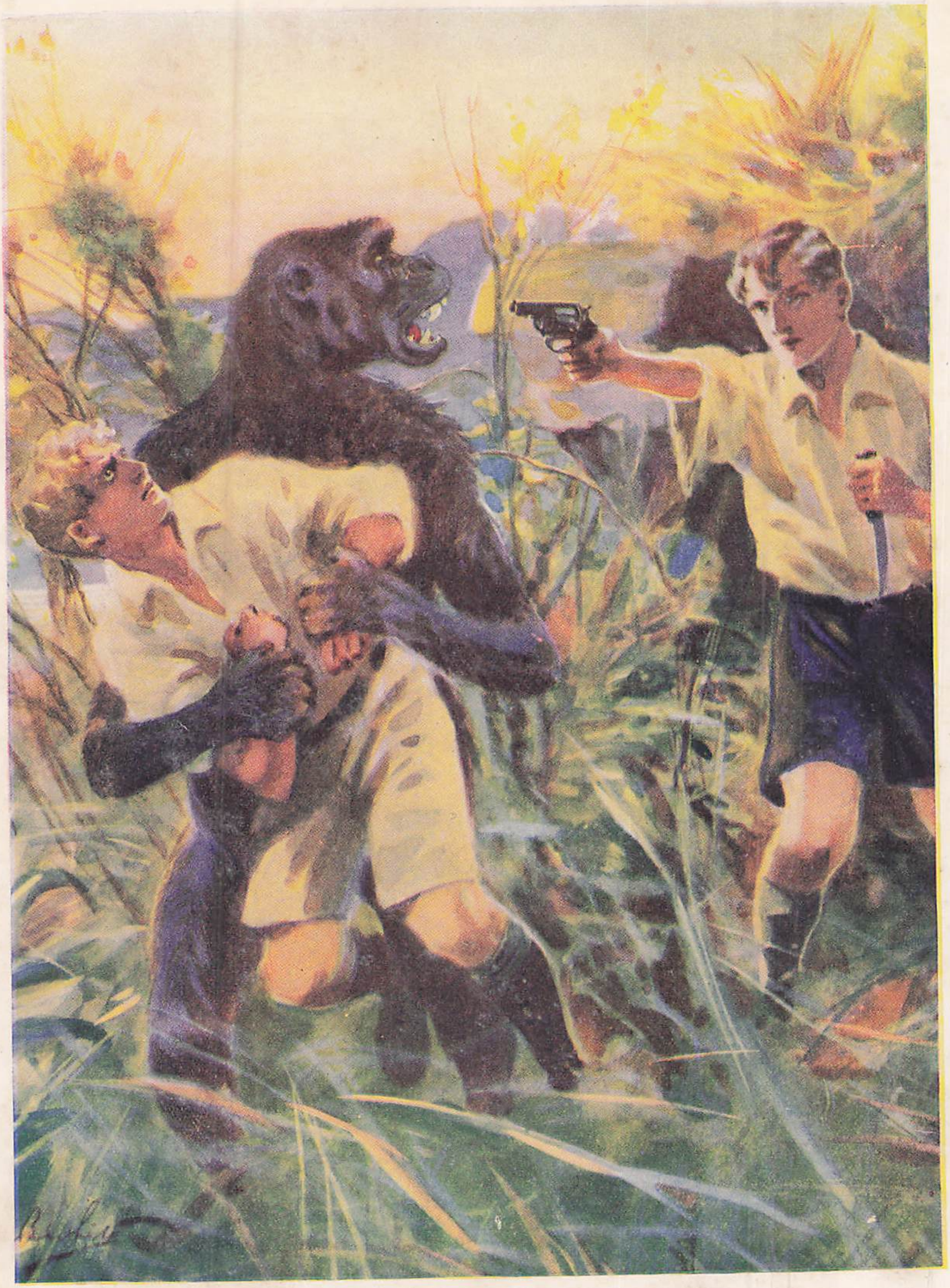
"Good heavens, Jim," exclaimed young Dent, "that's no gorilla, it's a man!" And Jim, looking down, saw that the ape-like mask, which had slipped its moorings and half-blinded its wearer's eyes during the fight, had concealed the head of one of the huge natives who had come to the camp and driven the safari porters away.

"By heck," said Jim, "I don't like the look of the way things are shaping, not a little bit. I've never heard of a Gorilla Cult, but, by gad, I'm beginning to believe there must be one. If that is so, Tom, the sooner we beat it out of this part of the world the healthier it will be for the lot of us. I'm afraid your guv'nor will have to cut out his scientific researches for the time being."

"In that case," Tom answered, as he fingered his aching and badly bruised throat, "I vote we make tracks for camp. Dad's not pig-headed really. If you can once make him realise the nature of our danger, he'll be willing to up pegs and hit the trail quick enough."

"It's the best thing to do," said Jim. "This expedition has failed, but I'm hanged if I'll be beaten. I'm coming back; and then," he shook his fist at the dense wall of forest that hid their enemies, "you lot can look out for trouble."





STILL THE GREAT BRUTE SEEMED TO HESITATE

BUGLER JOE'S LAST CALL

THERE was war on the North-west frontier of India and the 1st Middleshires had received their baptism of fire.

At present there were certain signs that the hill-tribes, which had been enticed into giving battle in the open, were preparing to bolt back to the fastness of their native hills. On the other hand, the present activities of the Pathans might be no more than a ruse to trap the British troops into a premature advance.

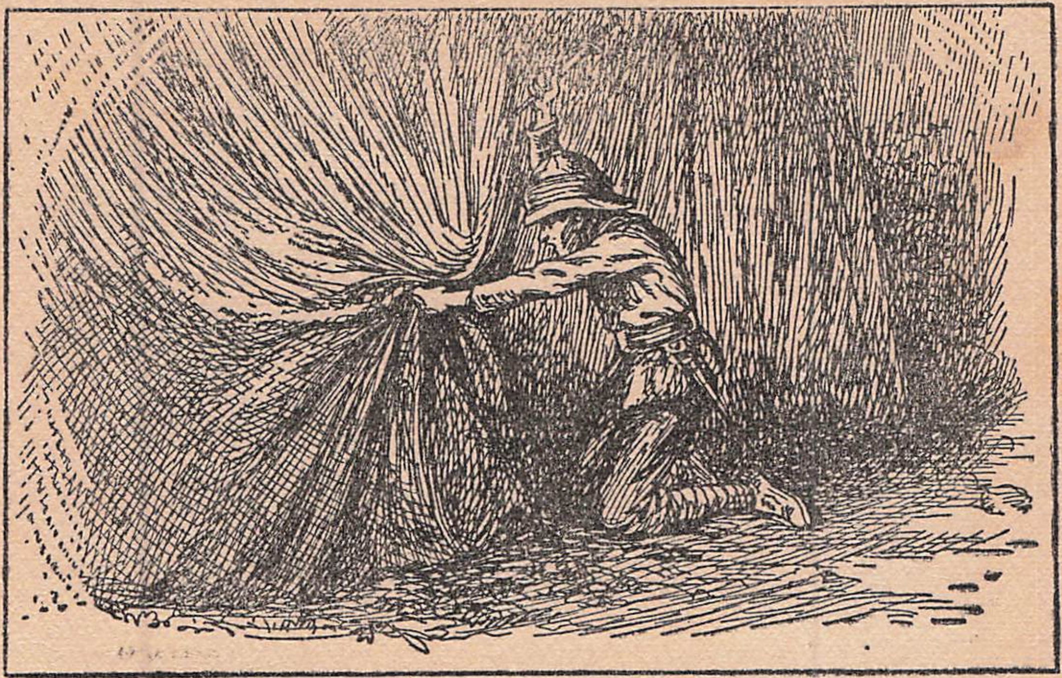
Much depended upon the real significance of the situation, and so the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief had summoned a council of officers commanding regiments, batteries and battalions to discuss the matter in secret at General Headquarters.

Now it so happened that Bugler Joe Jenkins, of the 1st Middleshires, was a born horseman, wherefore Colonel Jaffery, who commanded the battalion, chose the little lad for his orderly when he rode back from the front to attend the conference in a big tent occupied by the G.O.C.-in-C. at G.H.Q.

Bugler Joe's job on that occasion was merely to look after his C.O.'s charger and his own mount and to find as much shade as possible for the horses in the meantime. But the boy was a guttersnipe, bred and born; and, as such, was cursed with an insatiable curiosity.

On arrival at G.H.Q., the colonel told his bugler to take the chargers off to a nullah, which had been chosen as temporary horselines. Most of the mounts were in charge of native *saises*. Presently Joe saw one of these grooms drop down behind some boulders and begin to worm his way in the direction of the G.O.C.'s tent. After a last look to the picketing of his own charges, the boy strolled sually across to the rocks; but, once out of sight, he dropped flat belly and began to wriggle after the *sais*, whose actions he s highly suspicious.

h, there was the native stretched flat on the ground arquee. Before Joe could overtake him the man



JOE SLID HIS HAND ALONG THAT BULGE

had loosened a peg and slid, silent and sinuous as a snake, to a place of concealment between the double walls of the tent.

There was a nasty, purposeful smile on the little lad's set lips, as he drew his bayonet and stole towards the tell-tale bulge in the canvas, which betrayed the position of the eavesdropper. Joe slid his hand along that bulge, and felt the hidden figure tremble beneath his touch. His questing hand located the head of the spy and then, gripping his bayonet by the blade, he struck with all his strength.

He might have waited to hand over his unconscious prisoner and to hear the praise he had earned; but, in those brief moments, before the hubbub broke out and the spy was discovered, certain words, spoken in the tent, had reached his ears and so he went scurrying back to the nullah as fast as his legs would carry him.

At the moment the incident occurred General Daughtry had been telling the officers under his command that early and acc information as to the plans of the enemy would be of value. There seemed every indication, he said, that contemplating a retirement to the hills. Confirmati would enable the British troops to advance and mop up the enemy before they could gain the sanctuary of the mountains.

The words the G.O.C. had spoken were ringing in Joe's ears when he saw the unconscious spy carried away, and all the long ride back from G.H.Q. to the front he pondered the things he had overheard. Was this the great chance to serve England for which he had prayed since his soldier father had fallen in France? Could *he* discover the secret which the great British General was so anxious to possess?

Next morning the boy was missing when D Company's roll-call was taken.

. . . . .

Night had fallen already, and there was no moon to light the way when Bugler Joe slipped out of the Middleshire's lines and made his way forward to where a battalion of Lothian Highlanders were holding the front line, composed of stone-built sangars.

He was challenged, of course, but buglers of units, other than that in occupation, often visit a position as orderlies and the boy always had his answer ready.

There were not, of course, the same difficulties as would have been experienced in leaving a front line trench in France, since the sangar posts were separated by as much as a hundred yards in most cases. Joe took his chance, when he saw it, and slipped silently away into the dark desolation of No-man's-land.

He meant, if he could, to lie up during the day and to find out the strength of the Pathans holding the position on the plains, into the occupation of which the British had lured the enemy from their native hills. But although Joe pushed right on to the edge of the dry water course, which it was believed the enemy were holding, no sound disturbed the silence of the night. A further reconnaissance, when the moon rose, revealed the fact that the nullah was unoccupied.

That information, by itself, would be of but small value to the General. The thing to find out was whether the Pathans had actually withdrawn to the fastness of the mountains.

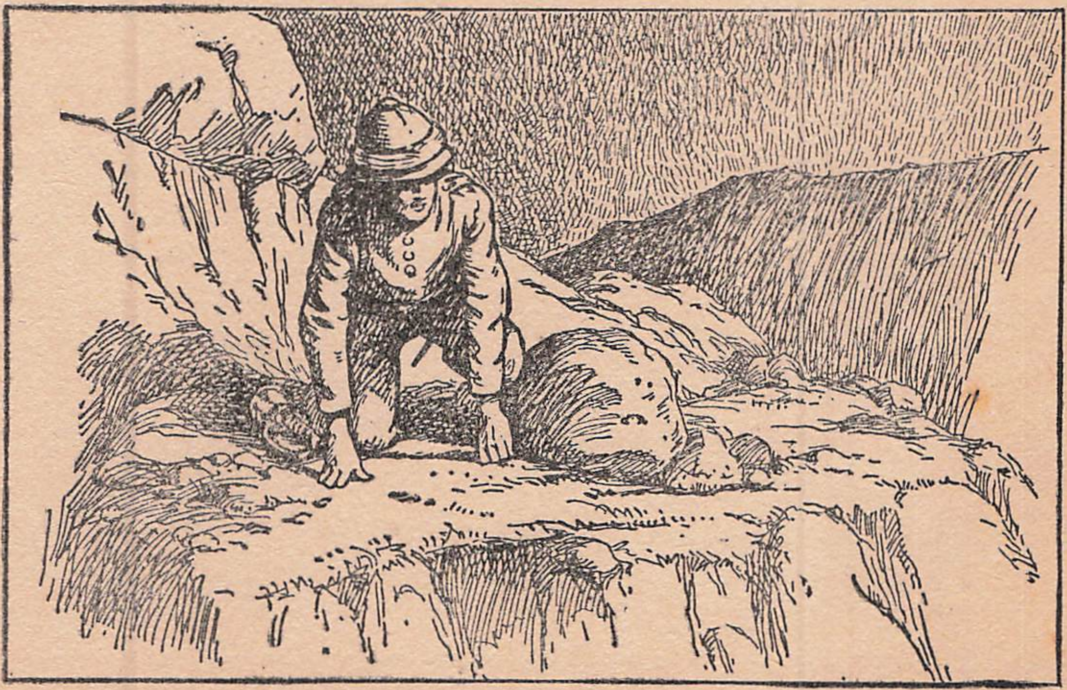
Bugler Joe decided to push on.

Some distance to the right and left of his present position he remembered having seen, from our own lines, two rows of low scrub, stretching from the nullah towards the foothills. Either line would afford cover for his further progress, but he fancied that the right hand line reached nearer to the hills.

It was at the end of the right hand trench of the dry watercourse that disaster overtook the boy. Simultaneously with his discovery that the nullah turned north, *beneath* the scrub a pair of great evil-smelling hands came out of the darkness and gripped him by the throat. Other men appeared and his wrists and ankles were firmly bound, but no word was spoken.

Daylight found Joe stretched flat on his back in a deep depression, full of fierce-looking, well-armed hill-men, and covered over with a carefully arranged screen of shrubs and bushes, the roots of which had no foundation in the rocky soil.

Soon after daybreak the air was filled with the throbbing roar of aeroplane engines. The R.A.F. squadrons, for which the General



THE NULLAH WAS UNOCCUPIED

has waited, had evidently arrived, and Joe knew that the pilots now passing overhead, would presently fly back, to report that the plains were unoccupied by the enemy. Then, if the British troops should advance, the infantry would be caught nicely in a cross-fire from the two shrub-covered branches of the watercourse stretching back from the revealed nullah.

The boy strained tentatively at his bonds, but they would not yield; then he felt around in search of some rocky projection, upon which to chafe through the constricting ropes, but luck was against him.

Midday witnessed signs of great activity all up and down the natural trench. Gun fire had been going on all morning and Joe imagined that the empty nullah and the lower foot-hills had been pretty thoroughly shelled, preparatory to a general advance.

Then a group of Pathan chieftains arrived, and stood gazing down curiously at the little *feringhee*. Joe shuddered when one of them drew a wicked-looking knife from the armoury in his waistband. But this chief spoke English.

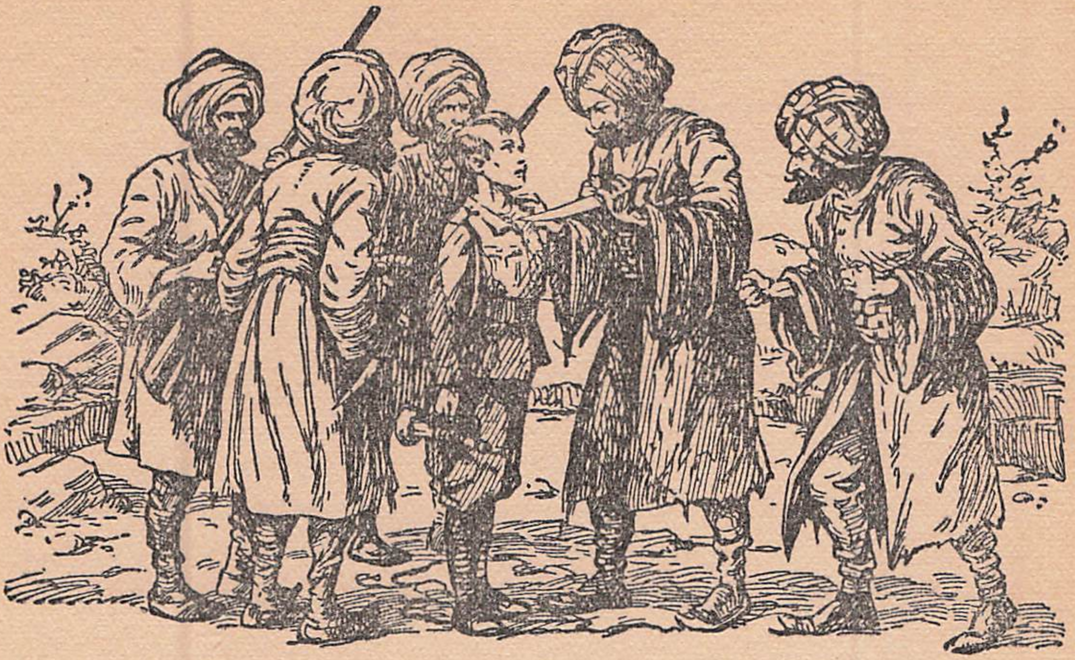
" Be not afraid, child," he said, " you shall not feel the kiss of steel—if you do my bidding."

The knife flashed and the ropes fell away from the boy's wrists and ankles, but it was some minutes before he could stand or use his arms, for his bonds had been tight indeed.

Presently the big Pathan pushed him up on to a sort of fire-step, from which a view of the plains could be obtained.

Joe saw that the tract of land between the British lines and the nullah was alive with British infantrymen advancing in open order. Soon the first two waves of soldiers had occupied the nullah and the tips of their fixed bayonets could just be seen, flashing and gleaming in the midday sunlight, above the nearer lip of the depression.

In that position the British troops were safe, but Joe trembled for them if the order to advance should be given. Meanwhile, he could see cavalry cantering up from the rear, and knew that a screen of mounted scouts would soon be passing through the infantry for the purpose of reconnoitring the foot-hills.



ONE OF THEM DREW A WICKED LOOKING KNIFE

At that sight a sigh of relief escaped him. But the Pathans, too, understood what was going forward, and realised that their double ambush would be discovered if once those oncoming horsemen should cross the nullah and spread left and right across the plains.

Joe's captor pricked him sharply with the point of a cruel knife, at the same time indicating the bugle that hung at the boy's side.

"Sound the Advance, child!" he ordered. As Joe hesitated the knife sank deeper into his flesh and the chieftain's hand put a dire pressure upon his shoulder.

With one last look at his distant comrades, Bugler Joe swung the bugle up to his lips and next instant the shrill notes of the "Stand Fast"—not the "Advance"—rang out clear and true. A moment later the call was taken up all along the British line.

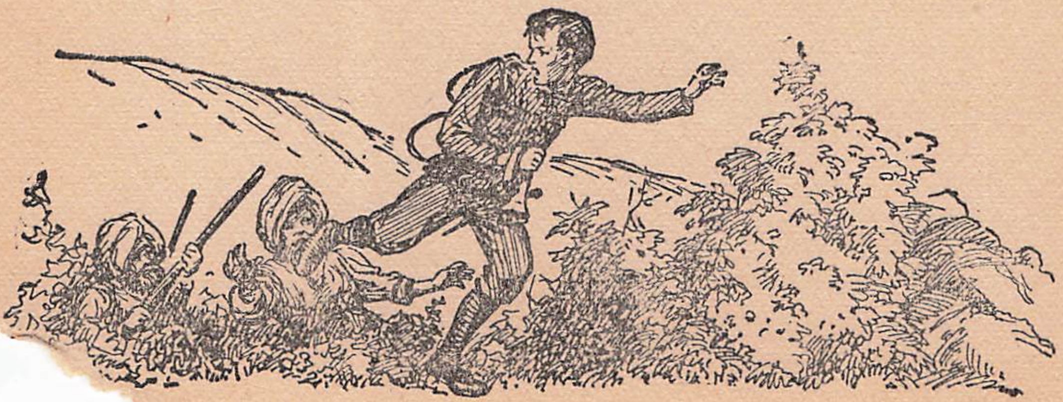
Eagerly the Pathans waited, with itching fingers caressing triggers, or curled in fierce grip about knife-haft or sword-hilt; but still the distant cavalry came on, and still the waiting infantry did not emerge from the nullah, to be slaughtered in the open plains, in accordance with the Pathans' plan.

Bugler Joe knew that the suspense could last but a moment longer before his captors must realise the trick he had played upon them. With a great spring he reached the lip of the concealed nullah and crashed through the screen of false scrub. A clutching hand closed upon his foot, but a wild kick with his free leg sent his boot-heel smashing into the tricked and furious chieftain's teeth. Then he was out in the open and running for dear life towards the British line, where heads were showing and surprised eyes watching him all along the edge of the nullah.

Suddenly the ragged line of scrub he had quitted was fringed with darting flames and, as the British soldiers ducked their heads into safety, Bugler Joe went down, his frail little body literally riddled by Pathan bullets.

But soon the batteries galloped up, unlimbered and came into action, shelling the enemy out of their hiding places and into the open, where they were first harried by the fire of the British infantry and finally ridden down and utterly destroyed by the pursuing cavalry.

Bugler Joe had sounded his last call and the British troops were saved.



SOME SWIMMER

IVOR WILLIAMS found life rather lonely on the Riviera. In the first place there was very little to do, if one did not bathe; and, meanwhile, some people who were not his pals had spread the rumour that Williams was that most contemptible thing, a water-funk, and even his friends were beginning to believe it. But, upon that point, they wanted to be perfectly sure and so the great plan was concocted.

There was a sporting American yacht owner, Cyrus P. Curl, staying in one of the big hotels and he had taken a keen interest in the doings of the party of young people, of whom Ivor had been the bright, particular light in all past adventures.

One morning Mr. Curl looked up from his paper to find a bunch of boys and girls grouped around him.

" Well, lassies and lads, what's doin'? " he drawled.

" We were wondering, Mr. Curl, if you would take us out in your yacht one afternoon," said Billy Jordan, constituting himself spokesman.

" Oh, please do, Mr. Curl," cooed all the girls.

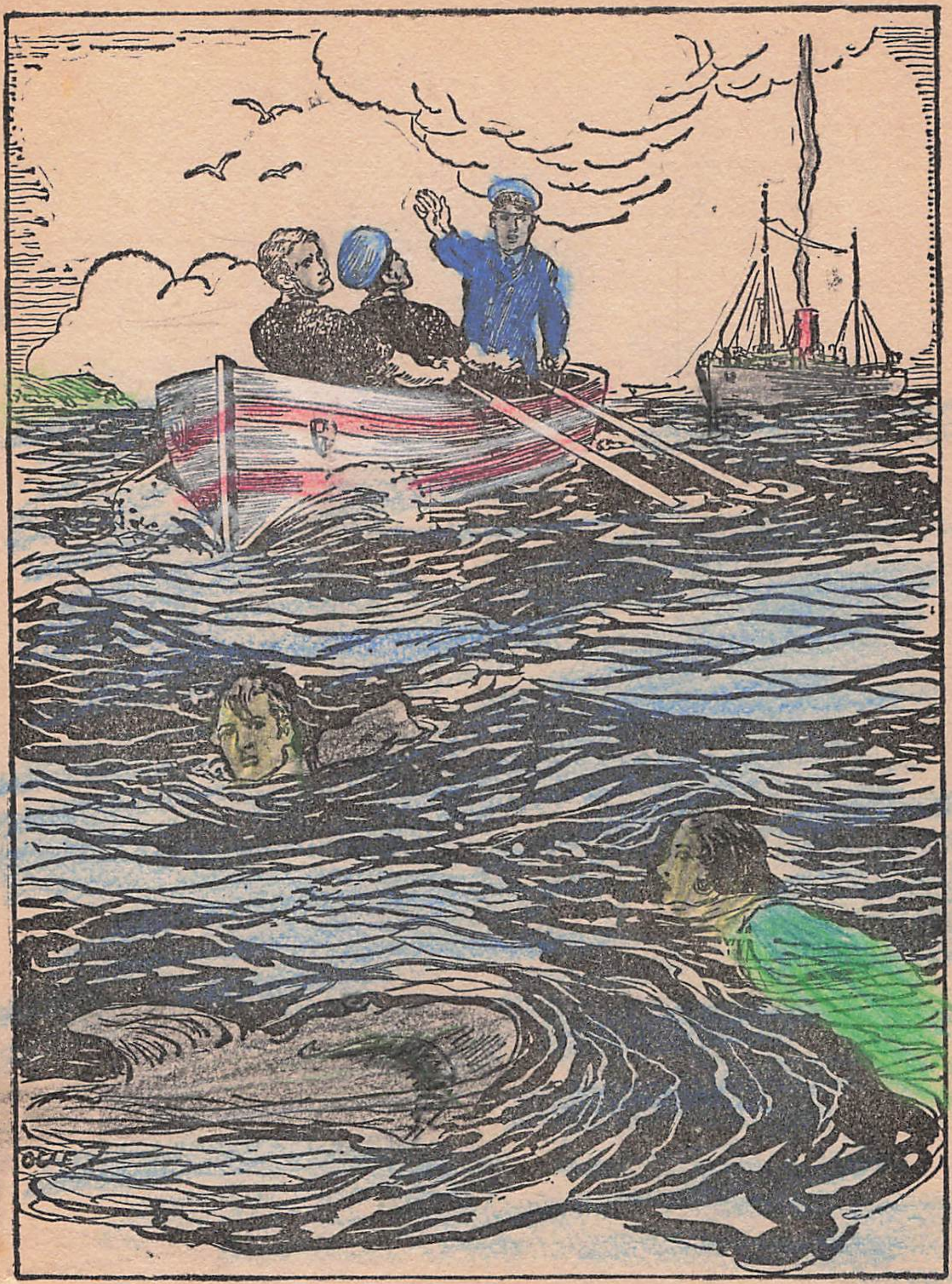
" Say, what's the big idea back of this request? " queried the American.

The young people had been out in the *Sea Fire* often enough before, and he could not fathom this sudden eagerness for another sail.

" Nothing much, only we thought you might let us bathe in deep water," interposed Clive, who apprehended all sorts of explanations that were trembling on his pal Billy's lips.

" Very well," agreed the yacht owner; " make it to-morrow morning, but there's nothing doin' for poor swimmers, mind you."

" Now we've got to make sure of getting Millie," said young Jordan, as they walked away. " She's stuck up for her precious Ivor all through the piece, and he's going to have the chance of justifying her confidence in him."



IT HAD TURNED ON ITS SIDE.

" You leave Millie to us," said one of the girls. It's your job to see that Ivor comes on board."

" And that part of the programme you can leave to us," Clive countered.

Millie made no objection to joining the others, when she was told that Mr. Curl had issued an invitation for a bathing party from the yacht; but when she met Ivor and asked if he was going with them, he answered that he had not been invited and, in any case, would not have accepted an invitation.

The girl was worried, for although her confidence in Ivor remained unskaken she did really think that he was behaving most strangely.

The next day dawned fair and finer than ever. Blue waters sparkled in the bright sunlight, a warm, gentle breeze whispered across the bay, and the *Sea Fire*, all white and gold lines and delicate tracery of rigging and spars, made a perfect picture where she rode at anchor.

Mr. Curl, keen to make the party a real success, had given orders for a spring-board to be run out from the side of the ship, and had sent a couple of prizes aboard, to be awarded to the best boy and girl divers.

Billy spotted the diving board as they rowed out to the yacht.

" Ever heard of walking the plank, Clive? " he whispered, nudging his boon companion in the ribs.

" You bet I have," Clive sniggered; " what a bright idea."

Meanwhile Ivor had lain bound and gagged in a spare cabin aboard the *Sea Fire* since before daybreak.

Curiously enough, Mr. Curl soon spotted the absence of the young Welshman, and asked why he had not joined the party. Clive and Billy were alone with the yacht owner when the question was asked and it was the quick-brained Clive who answered.

" Ivor," said he, " is an incurable joker, you'll see him presently, Mr. Curl. Don't be surprised if he pretends that he doesn't like bathing. It's all part of the game. We're going to make him walk the plank, pirate fashion."

The American demurred at first, but, in the end, the boys managed to convince him that nothing more serious than an elaborate practical joke had been planned for the amusement of the girls of the party. It never entered his head that young Williams was to be the victim, rather than the ringleader, of the jest.

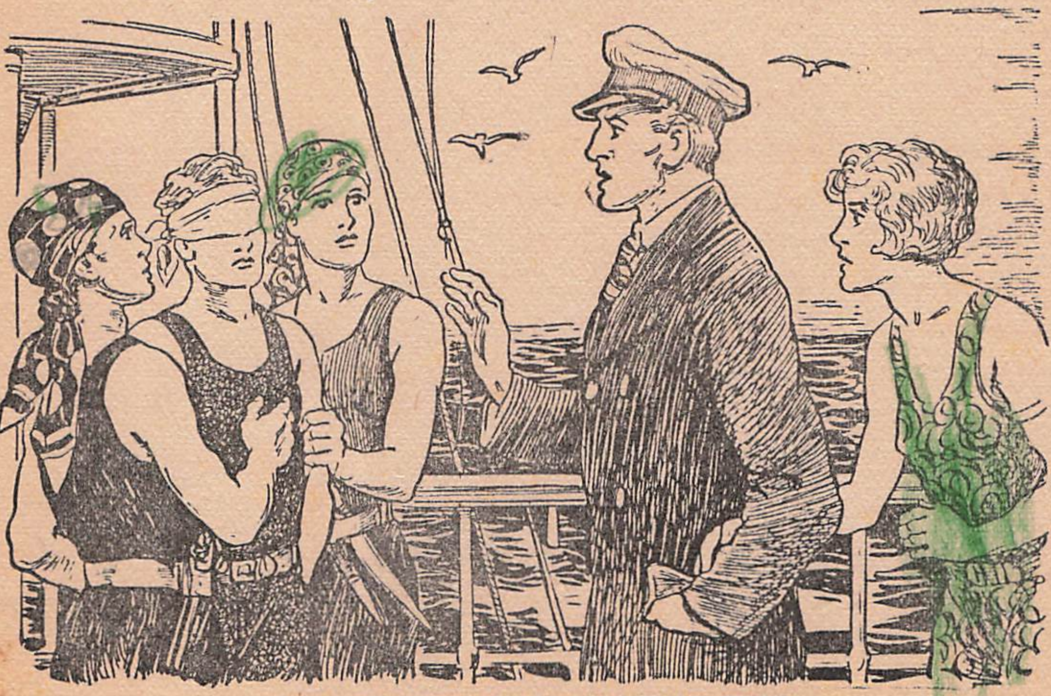
When the yacht was well out in the bay and everyone had changed into their swimming costumes, Billy and Clive, accompanied by the other boys, dived quickly below deck.

In a few minutes they re-appeared escorting Ivor, dressed also in a bathing costume but with his eyes bandaged.

Millie went very white when she caught sight of her chum. Mr. Curl saw her anxiety and looked curiously from the girl to the captive. He spotted the boy's bloodless lips and tightly set jaw, and fancied that the others were hanging on to his arms with a good deal more strength than a joke called for.

" Half a minute, you fellows," he called, " I want a word alone with Ivor before he walks the plank.

Very reluctantly the prisoner was released by the boys, who had made some attempt to deck themselves out as pirates, by



THEY RE-APPEARED ESCORTING IVOR

knotting gaudy handkerchiefs about their heads and thrusting such weapons as they could find through belts they had made with their neckties.

In a moment Ivor had snatched the bandage from his eyes, which shone with such real terror that there could no longer be any doubt as to who was to be the victim of the jest.

" I see," said Cyrus P. Curl, very slowly, " and I don't think there's any need for me to talk privately to Ivor. Come over here, boy. The rest of you get on with your bathing."

It was a sheepish quartette who dropped their knives and pulled the knotted handkerchiefs from their heads, but in a few minutes everything else was forgotten in the fun of diving and swimming.

Meanwhile Ivor, a trim figure in a well-fitting swimming suit, stood moodily beside his host.

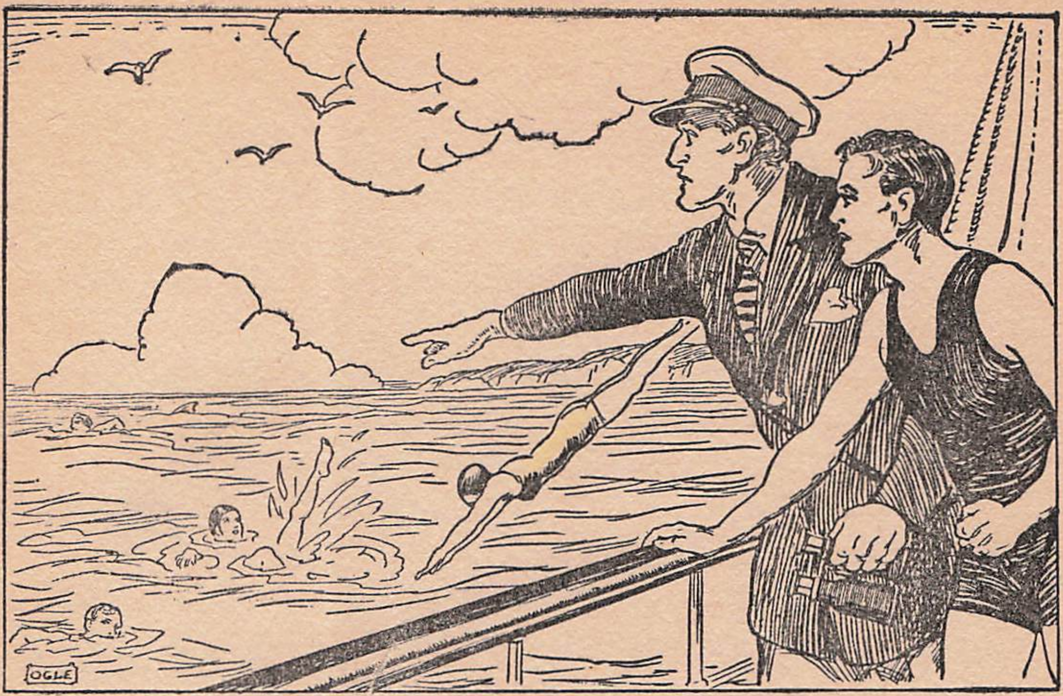
" What's the trouble, boy, can't you tell an old fellow? " queried the American.

" There's nothing to tell, Mr. Curl," Ivor answered. " It's only just that I hate the water."

" That's a rum sort of hatred, isn't it. Any particular reason? "

Ivor hung his head but made no answer, and Mr. Curl, with a shrug of broad shoulders, strolled over to the side of the yacht to watch the antics of the swimmers, now merrily disporting themselves in the water. Millie, he noticed, had left the others and had swum a good deal further away from the yacht than he cared to see her go. He shouted to a deck-hand to bring him a speaking trumpet, for he was anxious to recall the girl before she could get out of ear-shot.

Something of the American's anxiety communicated itself to Ivor and the boy joined him by the bulwarks. Mr. Curl had a pair of binoculars in a case slung across his shoulders and while he waited for the speaking trumpet to arrive he took out his glasses and focused them on the swimming girl who was now nearly a furlong distant from the *Sea Fire*.



I'LL SWEAR IT WAS THE DORSAL FIN OF A SHARK

Suddenly a startled exclamation escaped his lips. In a moment the lazy-looking American was changed into a brisk man of action. He rapped out a quick order to the Quartermaster to lower away a boat and then shouted in a stentorian voice to the swimmers to come aboard at once.

Ivor looked on in amazement, Millie seemed to him to be swimming strongly enough, but he had noticed something black, which had now disappeared, floating some distance ahead of her. He wondered if it was wreckage, and if Mr. Curl was frightened that the girl might get entangled in some sunken cordage attached to what he believed might be a floating spar.

" What's all the excitement about, Mr. Curl? " he queried, as they watched the sailors running to man the long-boat.

" If only I'd got a motor launch," cried Mr. Curl. " Didn't you see it, that black triangular wedge above the water, not a hundred yards away from the girl? I'll swear it was the dorsal fin of a shark. The brutes have been found in these waters before now."

For a second Ivor stood stock still, his brain working at fever pitch. He was terrified of the water, although he had swum like a fish almost from the day of his birth far away on the shores of the shark-infested South Seas, and he knew all there was to know about those terrible tigers of the deep. On the other hand Millie was his pet, particular pal, and Millie had stood by him through thick and thin. Now she was in deadly danger and perhaps no one else but he, himself, could save her. Even if the long boat got to her in time the shark might get her by the legs as the sailors pulled her into the boat. He doubted if one of them knew the only sure way of dealing with the peril. And there *is* only one way.

The boy's eyes caught the flash of steel from the deck as he turned. In an instant he had whipped up a heavy cook's knife Billy Jordan had discarded, and, with a quick turn below the hand-guard, he fixed it through the belt of his costume. Then, before Curl could stop him, Ivor Williams dashed along the diving board and flashed down to the sea in a perfect header.

His whole soul seemed to shrink and turn cold as the waves closed over him, but when his head broke the water again he was once more his own master.

With long, powerful, overarm racing strokes and threshing feet he tore through the water towards Millie, and back on the deck of the yacht old Cyrus said quietly " That boy sure can swim." Then he snatched the speaking trumpet from the hand of the sailor who had found it at last and his voice rang out a warning across the waves. Next instant Millie had turned and was swimming fast towards the yacht. But, meanwhile, that evil dorsal fin had appeared again and this time it was nearer than ever to the girl.

If her presence attracted the monster there was little hope that she could escape. But now Ivor had reached her and the boat was away at last and closing fast upon them.

Again the great voice rang out:

" Turn you young fool, turn, darn you! "

But Ivor did not turn. Less than a dozen yards behind Millie he had seen the dorsal fin of a shark again. Then he saw the white flash of the brute's belly almost beneath her. It had turned on its side for the final rush and the thought of the deadly snap of those steel-trap jaws sent a shudder through him.

Now Ivor was beating the water furiously with hands and feet and, for the moment, the shark sheered off. But the boy knew only too well that it would close in again.

With every second saved the gap was lessening between the girl and the oncoming boat, which seemed to leap through the water at the urge of willing arms.

Ivor could see the shadowy form of the shark sulking a little way off and not far beneath the surface.

With a heartfelt prayer for strength the boy drew the big knife from his belt and dived deep.

A moment later Millie gained the boat, was pulled in and the sailors rowed on to the rescue of Ivor. But as the boat passed over the spot where he had disappeared, there was a great turmoil below the surface a little further on and suddenly the waves were stained red with blood.

Millie screamed and the sailors swore as they beat the water with their oar blades. Then, for an instant, the furiously threshing shark showed with the hilt of a knife standing out against the white of its belly and, simultaneously, the haggard face of Ivor popped up on the other side of the boat. His swimming costume was almost gone and he was bleeding freely from the side and thigh where the rough skin of the shark's tail had rasped him, but he recovered his breath and most of his composure soon after they had lifted him into the boat.

" I've seen the South Sea Islanders do that trick a good many times when I was a kid," he volunteered, " but I've no particular fancy for trying it again myself. Feeling all right now, Millie, old girl? "

" Quite all right, thank you, Ivor," she answered, and added in a soft whisper, " I'm so glad I stuck up for you when all the others said you were a water-funk."

• • • • •

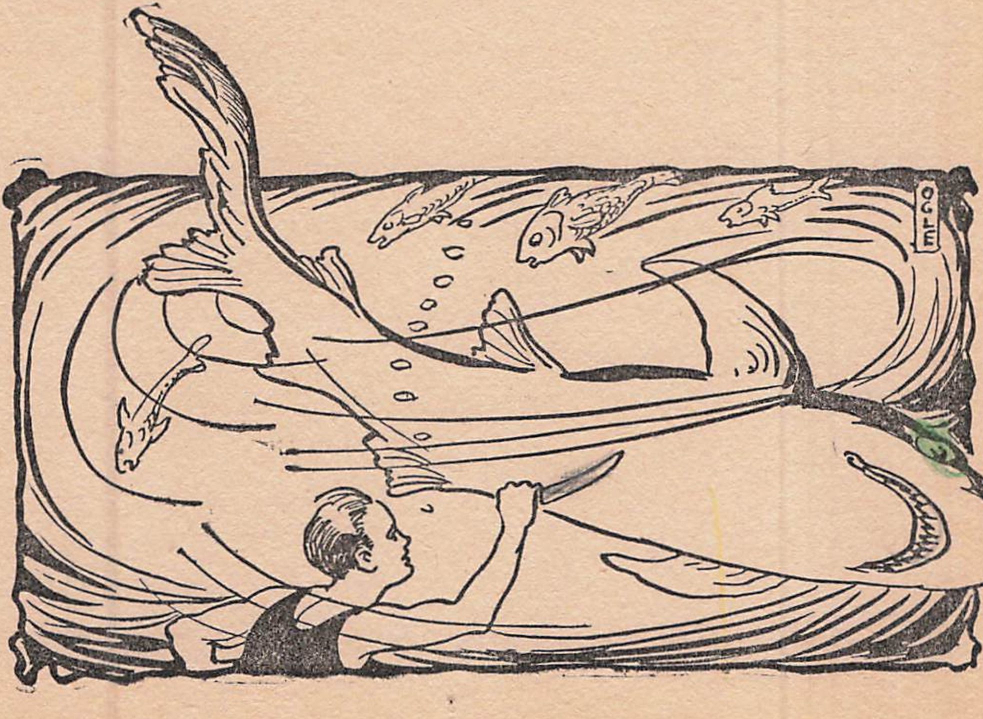
That night Mr. Curl insisted upon Ivor dining with him. When the meal was over, he dropped a kindly hand upon the boy's shoulder.

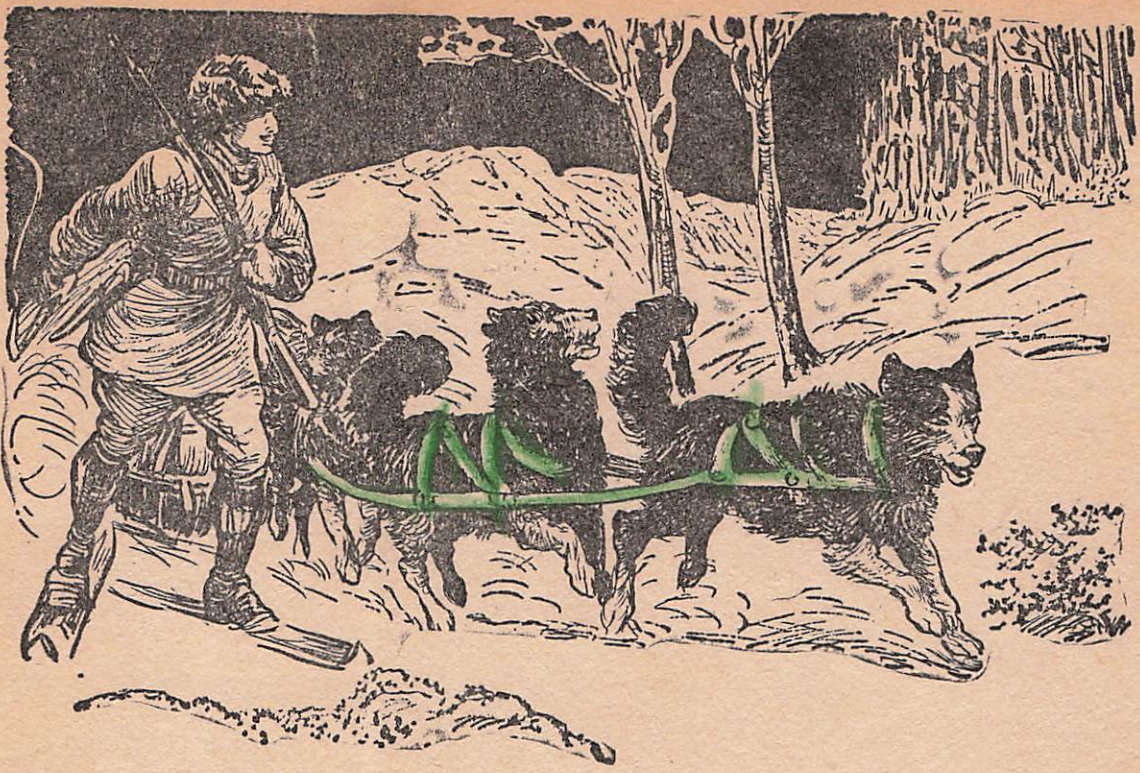
" Say, Ivor," he queried, " what's all this the boys and girls have been saying about you couldn't swim, or were afraid of the water. Why, boy, you swim like you was born to it, and they sure haven't anything on you when it comes to handing out the pluck."

Ivor thought for a moment before he answered.

" I *was* a water-funk until this morning, Mr. Curl," he answered, " but I haven't always been afraid. You see some years ago I went into a swimming bath that was being emptied and I got sucked through the drain pipe clear out to the sea-shore, and that sort of made me afraid of bathing."

" Gee, what do you know about that now! " exclaimed the American. " I'll say you sure were entitled to feel kind of scared of bathing parties after an experience like that."





THE WHITE BEAR

"BLACK" MERCER was the worst of a bad breed, and that is putting the case pretty high, where the men of the great white wastes of the Frozen North are concerned. At the same time it is not putting this particular case too high, for even in Klondike City the unbridled brutes who had shared in the gold rush had shunned this man, on account of his ruthless cruelty, his lust for gold and his ungovernable temper.

That which his heart desired Saul Mercer was not in the habit of withholding from his eyes. On the Klondike he made his pile and he spent his pile ; then some devil of restlessness driving him forth to seek for fresh fields to conquer, he harnessed up his dog-team and mushed farther and ever farther north. Rumour had it that there were yet newer gold-fields awaiting discovery in those virgin wilds, where the foot of the white man had seldom, if ever, left its print upon the snows.

But Mercer found no gold, and trapping and shooting interested him, only in so far as it was necessary for him to provide himself with food. How he managed to cross the tundra will never be known, for there no people live and birds and beasts are seldom seen. Maybe he managed to kill an occasional musk-ox, perhaps he trapped a silver fox now and again. I do not know. He had a kind of cold, ruthless courage, which caused women, children and small defenceless creatures to steer well clear of him, and barred him from the society of men more humanely natured than himself ; but which, at the same time, was matched with the sort of chilled-steel determination that had brought him through troubles and dangers, such as would have left most fellows flat, or finished them off.

He was quite alone and did not even make friends with the Malamutes which dragged his sledge. This was all the more strange, because when he was among human beings he was a man who forced his company upon others, whether they wanted it or not ; but up there in the Great Silence he was well content to be alone.

And yet his solitude was not destined to endure until such time as he should return to the fringes of the comparative civilisation of the Far North, for the day he completed the crossing of the tundra he caught sight of a cluster of igloos, and knew that he had lit upon an Esquimaux village.

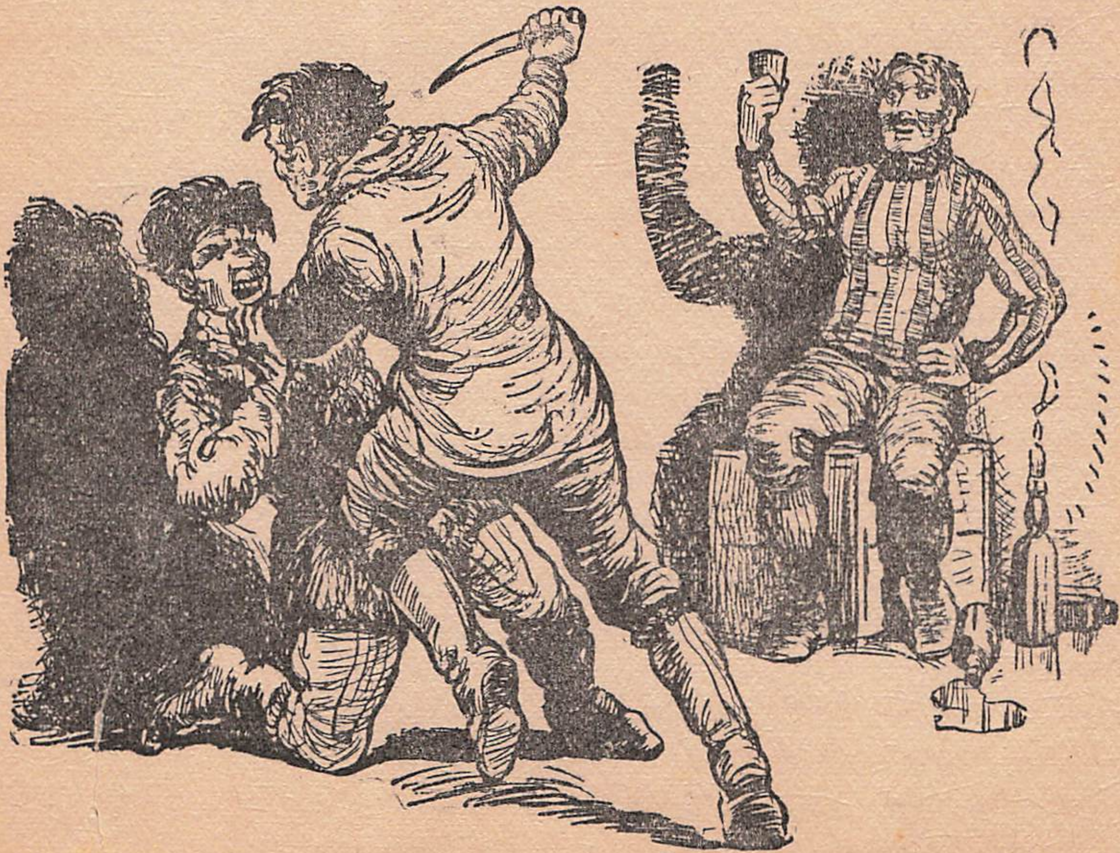
Now it is doubtful if that particular band of Esquimaux had ever seen a white man before. They were certainly unacquainted with the fiery hooch which Mercer produced after he had unloaded his sledge, and had transferred its contents to the igloo they built for him.

It was in no spirit of generosity that Mercer made the innocent Esquimaux drink with him. It was merely that the man felt an urge towards conviviality, and what he wanted Saul Mercer saw that he got. The party that followed was not a pretty one, for the Esquimaux, squatting interestedly round a blubber stove, while the Northern Lights shone weirdly through a clear ice window in the thickness of the ice and snow walls, quickly succumbed to the heady intoxicant that was served out to them. Those who went frankly to sleep, or were violently sick, according to their natures, were the lucky ones. The rest soon fell to fighting, while Mercer looked on and roared with laughter. Soon, however, he tired of the sport, and cleared his guests out of the igloo with the toe of his heavy boot. The dead and the dazed he threw after the living, and there were soon many sinister scarlet patches to be seen welling from under the bodies that were left stretched out upon the hitherto white purity of the snow.

The white man fitted ice blocks into the oval opening of the igloo and rolled himself in his blankets, still chuckling with evil amusement. He was in no ways ashamed of the debauch, for it was his boast that he feared neither gods, men nor devils, and that he knew no such thing as a distinction between right and wrong. A man was master of his own fate was Saul Mercer's creed, and he helped himself with both hands to whatever life had to offer.

But if the judgment of God had failed to grip him by the heel within the narrow confines of civilisation, and if the hand of the Lord had been withheld in the milder wildernesses, where white men go more or less regularly, some people say that the old gods still hold their sway in the Northland, and it was to the farthest fringes of that Northland that Mercer now had come.

The Esquimaux were a sick and sorry people when they crept out of their dwellings after sleeping off the effects of their unusual potations, and even the dour ferocity of their strange guest could not induce any of the men to take him hunting. So Mercer went off on his own, and was



MERCER LOOKED ON AND ROARED WITH LAUGHTER.

away for a couple of days. When he came back the Esquimaux were a sadder people than ever, for the wife of their chief had been missing since the preceding morning.

This information did not interest Mercer, for he was quite callous to the sufferings of others ; nor did he deem it necessary to reveal the fact that he had been responsible for the woman's death. One Esquimau more or less meant nothing to him, and anyway her death had been accidental, since a slight blizzard had been blowing at the time when he had been making his way to the seal-holes in the ice, and it was for a seal that he had mistaken the woman, whose form he had seen but dimly through the whirling snowflakes, as she crouched immobile above one of the blow-holes.

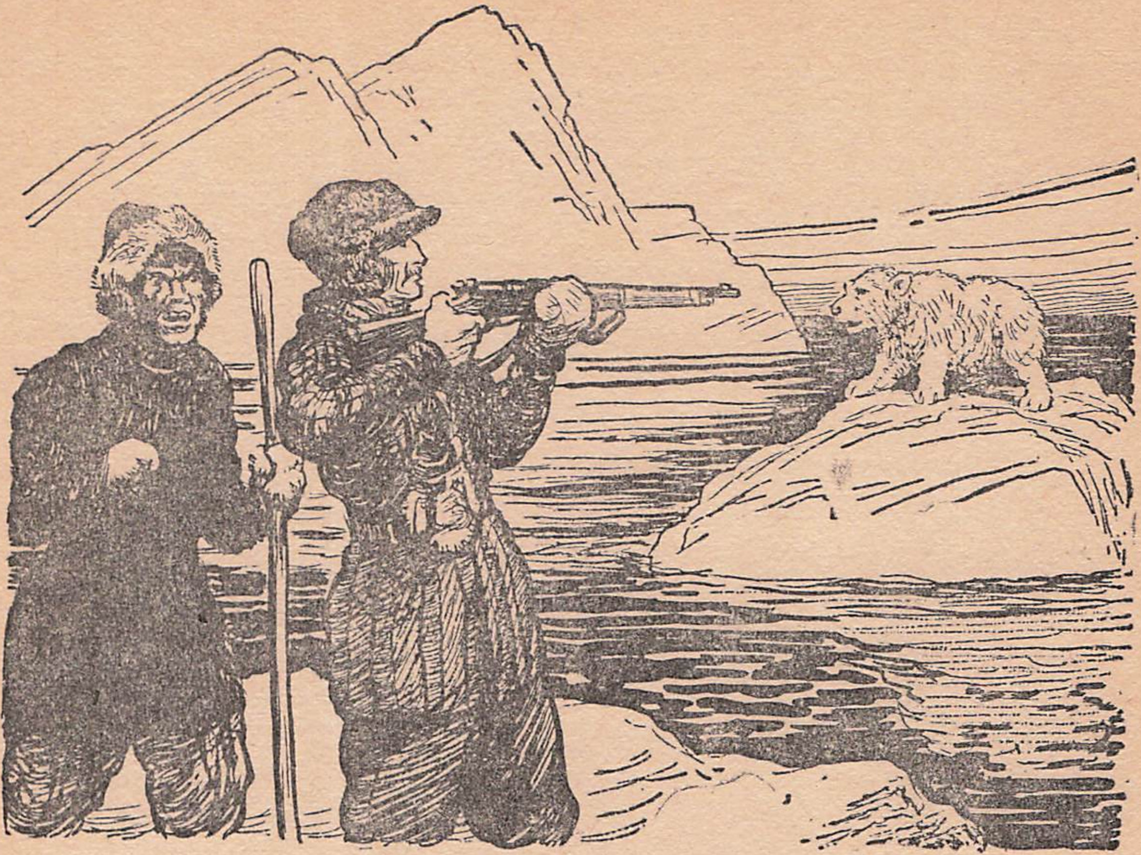
She had been quite dead when he had reached her, for Mercer was not the man to miss his mark, and he had dropped her body into the cold, black water, so that there did not seem much chance that anyone would ever find out the truth of that tragic incident. But still, old Mother Nature was only biding her time, for she is a queer old dame, and has a way of her own of looking after her unspoiled children, who dwell in the last lost lands, to which that not unmixed blessing, our so-called civilisation, has not yet penetrated.

Upon the night of his return to the igloos, Mercer was compelled to drink his hooch alone, for Aiut had imposed a period of mourning upon the tribe, and none of them dared break the taboo he had placed upon them.

In this way a week went by, and meantime the ice was breaking up, great lanes of water showed where, previously, there had been nothing but a glittering, glassy surface, and already more than one huge iceberg was sailing slowly towards the open sea.

Mercer was well pleased, for he had been told that the gold reefs would be found in the living rock which lay beneath the surface of the ice, which in some places was already melting rapidly. This time, when he asked Aiut to accompany him upon his hunting, the Esquimaux did not refuse.

It was not possible to take along the dog-team, on account of the way the ice was breaking up, but, good pioneer as Mercer was, he could not but marvel at the manner in which Aiut found his way unerringly among the water-lanes and over the still frozen hummocks.



MERCER SHOT THE ONLY CUB THEY CAME ACROSS.

That day they saw several polar bears, and Mercer shot the only cub they came across out of sheer wantonness. Aiut was terrified, both by the noise of the report and the result of the deafening explosion. He looked strangely at the white man, for the Esquimaux have this much of sporting instinct, that they do not kill the cub that a mother is nursing. It was obvious that he did not approve of what had been done ; but, none the less, when the mother, after nuzzling the warm, bloody little body of her offspring for a moment, plunged from the iceberg upon which she had been floating seawards, and swam strongly for the solid ice-pack which supported her persecutor, he managed to get Mercer out of harm's way, before the infuriated monster could come at him.

Later on they came to a small section of virgin rock, from which the ice-cap had withdrawn, and Mercer grew wildly excited, for by certain indications, which told their own tale to such an experienced mining prospector, he believed that he had stumbled upon the thin outcrop of what might well prove to be a rich gold reef. He would have investigated the matter there and then but for the fact that Aiut, who kept casting anxious glances in all directions, would not tarry. Nor was that the only way in which the Esquimaux showed signs of an unsuspected, but none the less stern, determination. For when Mercer, who was forced to follow the chief, since he knew that he could not find his way back to the igloos alone, now that the ice was breaking up, would have assembled the tribe for another hooch party, Aiut spoke far too quickly to his people for the white man to follow what was being said, and thereafter every man and woman of them crept into the igloos and built ice-blocks into the openings. All, that is, except Aiut. Mercer caught him by the leg just as he was disappearing from sight, yanked him out into the open and beat him unmercifully.

That night Mercer found small pleasure in his own company, for he was mad to get at the gold which, he believed, lay ready to his hand ; the thought of all that wealth, which he might win, made him intolerably restless ; but in the end, and hardened sinner though he was, he succeeded in drinking himself into a maudlin slumber. He never heard the feet, that went padding round his igloo all through the night, and slight snow, which fell just before morning, obliterated the tracks of the four large paws.

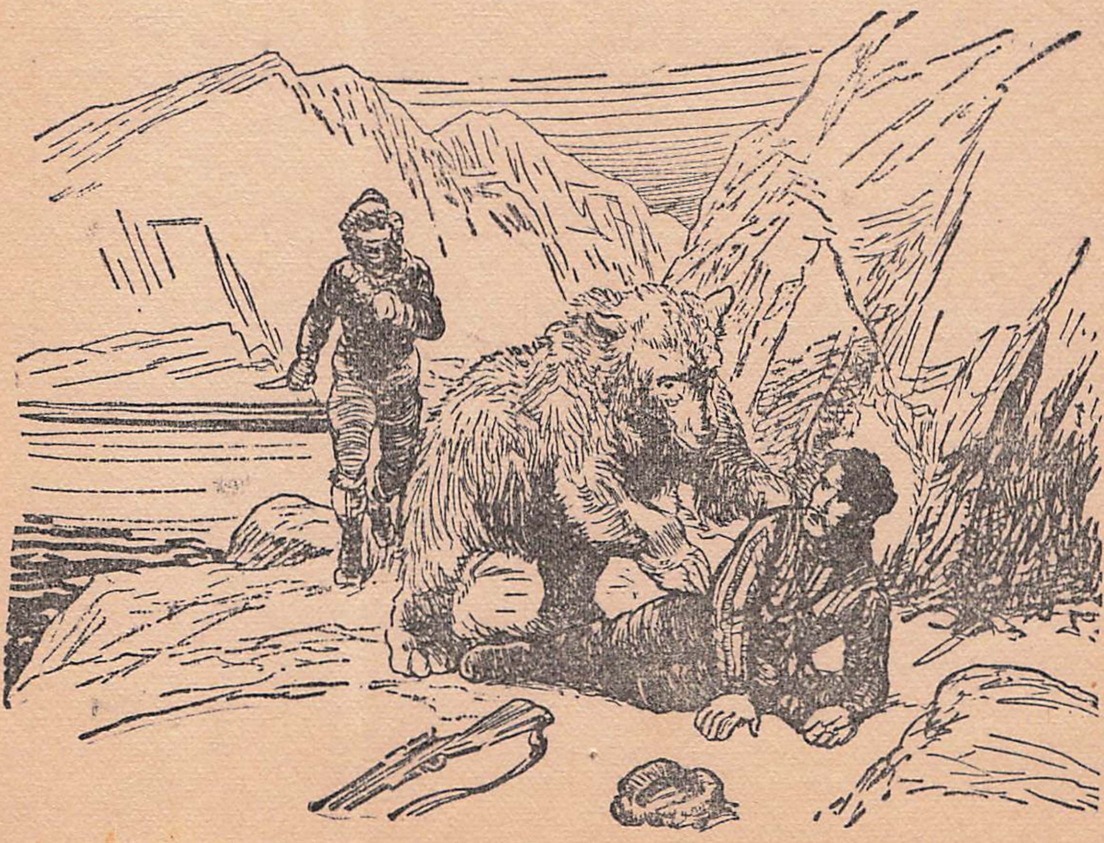
Mercer awakened, feeling none too good, pushed away the ice blocks, and went out into the biting cold for a breath of fresh air. He yawned and stretched himself, then stared around him in bewilderment, for the door of every igloo was open, and yet there was not a single soul in sight. The whole tribe had departed while he slept.

That the Esquimaux had taken nothing of their guest's was obvious, for even now the barking of the dog-team echoed from the ice building in which they were kennelled. Mercer went along and fed them, for he had an idea that he might be needing their services pretty badly later on, but not yet. First he was determined to find, by hook or by crook, the rock in which he believed that he had located a gold reef. It was not easy going ; in fact, he would never have succeeded but for the fact that he had taken pretty careful bearings, as he had followed Aiut back to the igloos upon the preceding day. As it was he picked his way carefully from one ice-floe to the next, until he gained the solid pack from which the mainland, where stood the igloos, was cut off by a number of waterways, which were continually increasing in number and altering in appearance.

No life seemed to be stirring, and he caught no glimpse of the Esquimaux, nor did he even see their tracks. Hours went by, sometimes in fruitless wanderings, at others in long waits, while the bergs moved by and made it impossible for him to cross the waterways. In the end, however, he won to his objective, leaned his rifle against the cliff face, drew his knife and began picking away methodically at the tinted vein in the rock upon which his hopes were centred. Nor were those hopes false, for soon soft, dull-red gold showed clearly upon the point of the steel blade.

Mercer threw down his knife, knocked over his rifle and danced and yelled for joy. The finding of the gold had made him more drunk than any quantity of hooch could ever have done. He thought himself alone, he did not care ; but none the less Mother Nature was waiting, and the sounds of his jubilation reached yet other ears.

A big she-bear appeared from the green shadows of a deep crevasse in a floating berg. She stood quite still for a moment, listening, testing the wind daintily with twitching nostrils ; then she slid into the icy flood water without a sound and swam strongly towards the cliff with only the black tip of her nose showing above the flowing tide.



BENDING TO RECOVER THE WEAPON HIS FOOT SLIPPED.

From the top of the cliff yet other eyes looked down, a great number of black, beady little eyes, as the Esquimaux watched interestedly to see what the strange white man would be up to next.

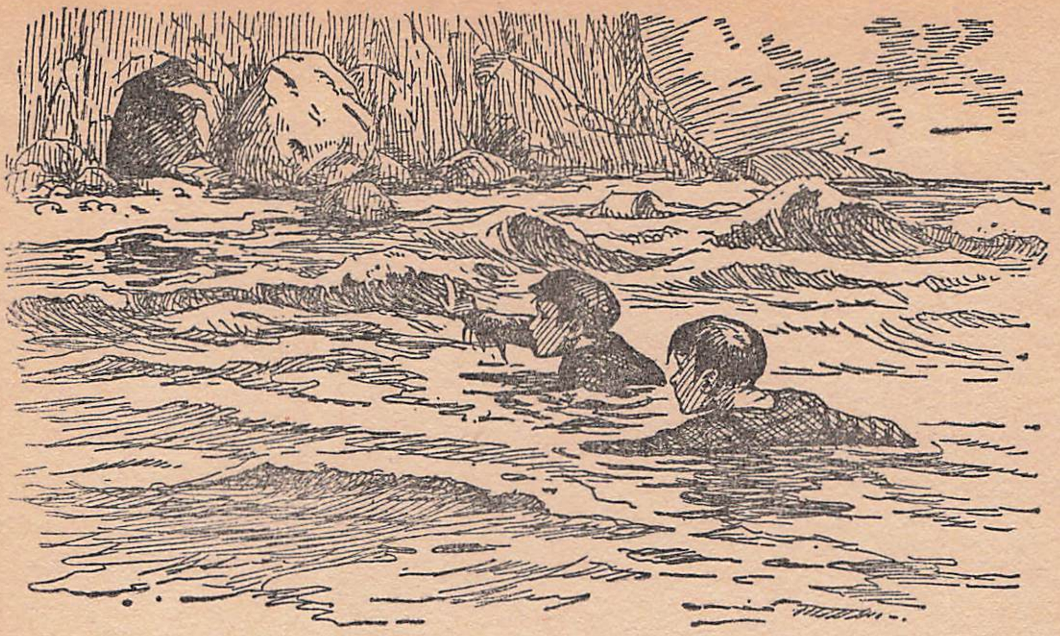
It was Aiut, raising his head as a sudden thought came to him, who first saw the bear, and telling his people to stay where they were, he scrambled down the back slope of the cliff and hurried round its base. Yesterday he had seen the white man use his amazing weapon, and he believed that all that was needed was a word of warning, which would enable Mercer to save himself. Aiut might not approve of the white man, but instinct prompted him to save a human being if he could.

As the Esquimau appeared round the bend of the cliff, the bear climbed out of the water, and still Mercer had not seen her. It was a cry from Aiut that attracted his attention. Immediately he made a grab at his fallen rifle ; but, in bending to recover the weapon, his foot slipped and next moment the bear was dragging him towards the water.

Aiut snatched up the weapon, and not knowing how to use it otherwise, reversed it as a club and rushed at the bear. The beast cowered back instinctively, and its claws, caught fast in the material, ripped Mercer's shirt away from his chest. Then Aiut saw the ivory talisman which the white man wore around his neck on a sinew of reindeer. He had last seen that piece of walrus tooth upon the bosom of his wife, and, believing that Mercer had killed her, Aiut sprang back and cast the rifle from him. At the same moment the she bear, who was cubless, slid back into the water, dragging Mercer with her.

Mother Nature had hit back, and for a time the wild was saved from those evils which the white man takes ever with him when he invades the last waste places of the world ; for Aiut, when he led his people back to their igloos, destroyed everything that had belonged to the white man, lest any taint of that man's spirit, which the savage knew instinctively was a bad spirit, should be left upon the land. How right the chief was in his actions might well be seen from the way his people sniffed, and the longing look there was in their eyes, as he smashed the last of the bottles of hooch that Mercer had brought with him.

Soon, however, a kindly, austere wind came rustling down from the Pole, bore away the last pungent reek of the spilt spirits and a clean white purity laid its spell once more upon that desolate place, which, yet, is home to the people who live in the Frozen North.



SMUGGLERS' HOLE

TWO boys struggled ashore through a welter of breaking waves, their boat, overturned by a sudden squall, was already at the bottom of the sea. Before them yawned the black mouth of a cave set deep in the cliffs.

" By gum! it's Smugglers' Hole," volunteered Roger Learoyd. " The tide's just turned, we're completely cut off, and it'll be long after midnight before we shall be able to get round the rocks at either end of Smugglers' Hole Bay."

" Can't we climb up the cliffs? " asked Tony desperately, for he knew how worried his mother would be when he did not return home by bed-time.

" *You* can try, if you like," Roger answered indifferently, " but just take a look at them cliffs before you make a start."

Tony looked, as he was bidden, and what he saw of the beetling crags and formidable cliffs convinced him quickly that there could be no escape by that dizzy road.

" Why is this cove called Smugglers' Hole, Roger? " he queried presently.

" Because smugglers used it in the old days, o' course."

Tony got up and went off on his own to investigate.

" Roger," he called from the far end of the cave, " is this the Smugglers' Hole? "

The young fisherman joined Tony and, together, the boys stared down through a narrow opening, flanked by a great round boulder, which rocked backwards and forwards, when one of them brushed accidentally against it.

Beyond the opening stretched a spacious inner cavern. Tony would have carried his explorations further, but Roger put a harsh restraining grip upon his shoulder.

" Don't ee go in theer, Mars' Tony," he warned. " Folks do say as Smuggler Dan's ghost walks o' nights in this fearsome place, an' I'm mortal scared o' spirits."

Presently the boys settled themselves down just inside the opening from the sands to the outer cave and Roger, despite his professed fears, was soon fast asleep. Tony, however, was abnormally wide awake.

All the cave was still in darkness, but the foreshore, with little lazy waves lapping the silver sands, showed almost as bright as by day in the white, refulgent moonbeams.

Tony listened to the soft " Hush-hush " of the waves, as the little, dulling edge of foam washed up the sands.

Suddenly he leaned forward. A sharp " Plop " had shattered the silence, where a great, glistening, grey back had broken the water, and now some evil monster of the deep was nosing its way slowly into the cove and making its way towards the shore.

Tony pressed his hand over Roger's mouth, as he shook him awake.

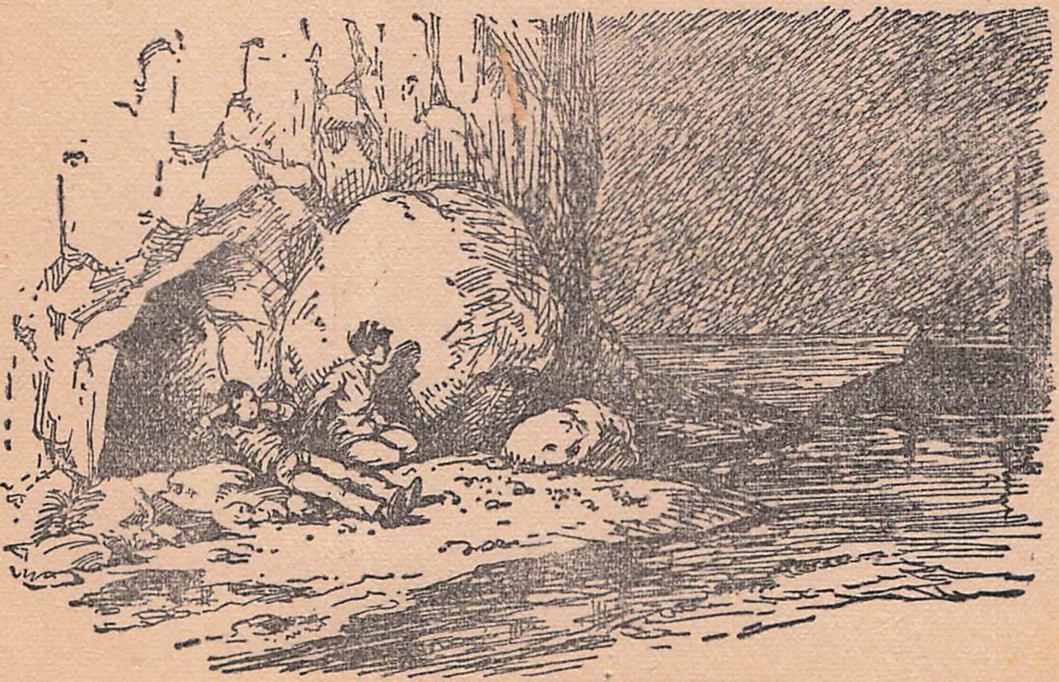
" There's a submarine just off-shore," he whispered urgently, and felt the startled exclamation Roger would have uttered break itself against his suppressing palm. A moment later the moonlight betrayed the tell-tale " U " upon the bows of a German submarine. Then a hatch-cover was lifted and a man emerged on to the deck, reached the shore and made his way towards the cave.

"Quick," ordered Tony Harkness, in a commanding whisper, "down with you through the Smugglers' Hole. That man on the beach is a darn sight more dangerous than Old Dan's ghost."

To their surprise the boys found the inner cave faintly lit by moonbeams, which, evidently, filtered down through some fissure in the rocks high overhead. The moonbeams, however, had not yet reached the wall which held the Smugglers' Hole and, in a corner, the boys sought and found a place of concealment.

Hardly were they hidden, before a German Submarine Officer appeared. Tony wondered whether the man would leave again before the moonbeams, travelling round the walls, should betray their presence. Discovery meant certain death, for it was war time, and the boy shuddered slightly at the thought.

Then all fear was forgotten with the revelation of the purpose which had brought an enemy naval officer on to British soil in war time. The man was busy with the far wall now, moving rocks and stones hither and thither. When he turned again towards the opening he held a long sealed package in his hands.



SUDDENLY HE LEANED FORWARD

So that was it! German spies in England, were using Smugglers' Hole as a secret " Post Office," from which to send out information they had stolen, and the " postman " who collected their letters was a German submarine officer.

" Collar him as soon as he comes within reach, but don't let him make a sound," breathed Tony, with his lips close to Roger's attentive ear. As he spoke he felt his comrade's muscles tauten for the coming struggle.

On came the unsuspicious German and, it is extremely doubtful if he ever knew what struck him. Tony tackled him low with all the vigour of a healthy young thunderbolt. Roger enveloped the man's head and shoulders in the coat he had just slipped off. Then the fisher-lad straddled across the captive, choking him to silence with a terrible grip upon his throat and holding him down with bony knees grinding cruelly into soft arm muscles.

" Splendid," panted Tony, " hold on Roger while I fix his ankles with my belt."

" Take mine for his elbows, Mars' Tony; your neck-tie will do for his wrists," Roger growled. " What about a gag? Will my cap do if we fix it firm with a handkerchief knotted behind his head? "

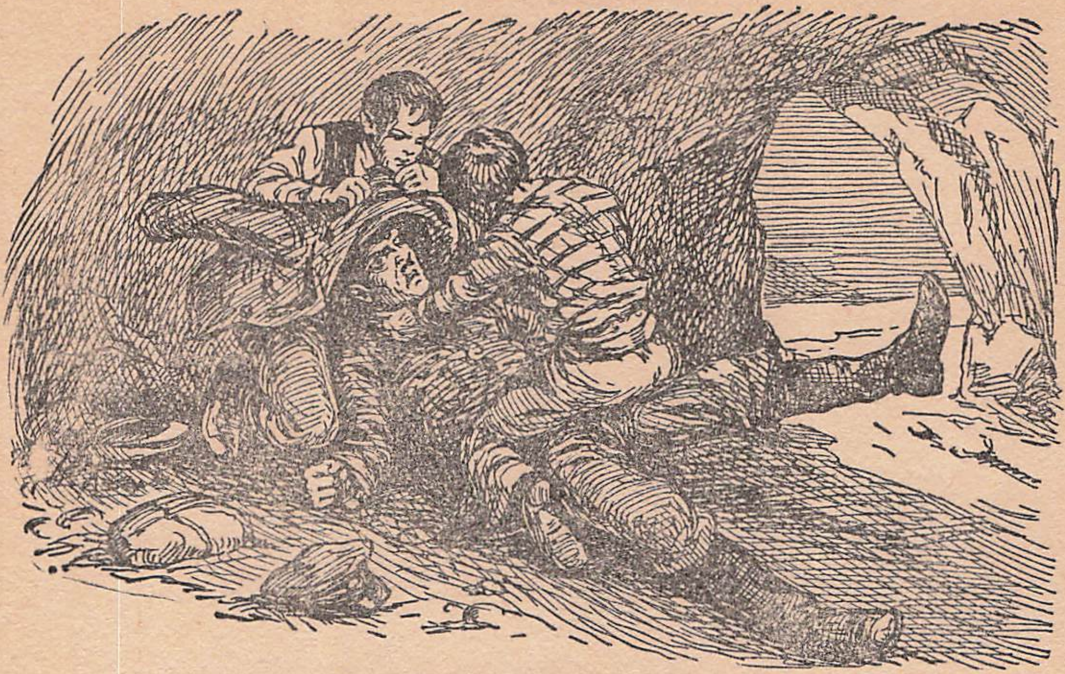
It was then that Tony remembered the trembling rock and, with that recollection, the great inspiration came to him.

" Don't gag him and don't choke him for the love of Mike! " Tony ordered, " I've got a better scheme than that. Get out of here and behind the rock by the Hole as fast as you can, then watch me until the sights come on. Half a minute though, I want his revolver."

Even before the two English boys had reached the shelter of the trembling mass of rock, which stood sentinel over Smugglers' Hole, night was made hideous by furious shouts for help from the German officer.

A moment later the crew of the German submarine came pouring into the cave. As the last of them disappeared down Smugglers' Hole, Tony flung all caution to the four winds.

" Now put your back into it and heave you lazy beggar," he shouted, and, with the words, flung his own weight against the



A TERRIBLE GRIP UPON HIS THROAT

rocking stone, straining and tugging until he thought his very heart would burst with the exertion.

Time and again the rocking stone bashed the boys back against the wall on its return swing, and, time and again, bruised and bleeding, they flung themselves upon it afresh, until, at last, the great rock tore itself from its ancient seating and crashed over with a terrific thud to close the only exit from Smugglers' Hole.

The crew of the submarine and their commander were completely trapped, but, for some moments, neither boy realized the amazing capture they had effected, for they were far spent by their terrific exertions.

Roger was the first to recover.

" Come on, Mars' Tony, tide's not turned yet, but I reckon we'd best risk swimming for it."

" No," said Tony, and his jaw jutted out obstinately, " I want the submarine as well."

" Gor'a'mighty! " gasped Roger, all in a breath, " did ever anyone hear the like o' that? "

Tony thumbed back the safety catch of the heavy Mauser pistol he had taken from the German officer and stole cautiously towards the shore.

There lay the submarine, rising and falling gently in the onshore swell, but not a man showed up on deck.

"You guide me," said Tony, and sank on his back as they entered the water, for he meant at all costs to keep his newly-acquired pistol dry.

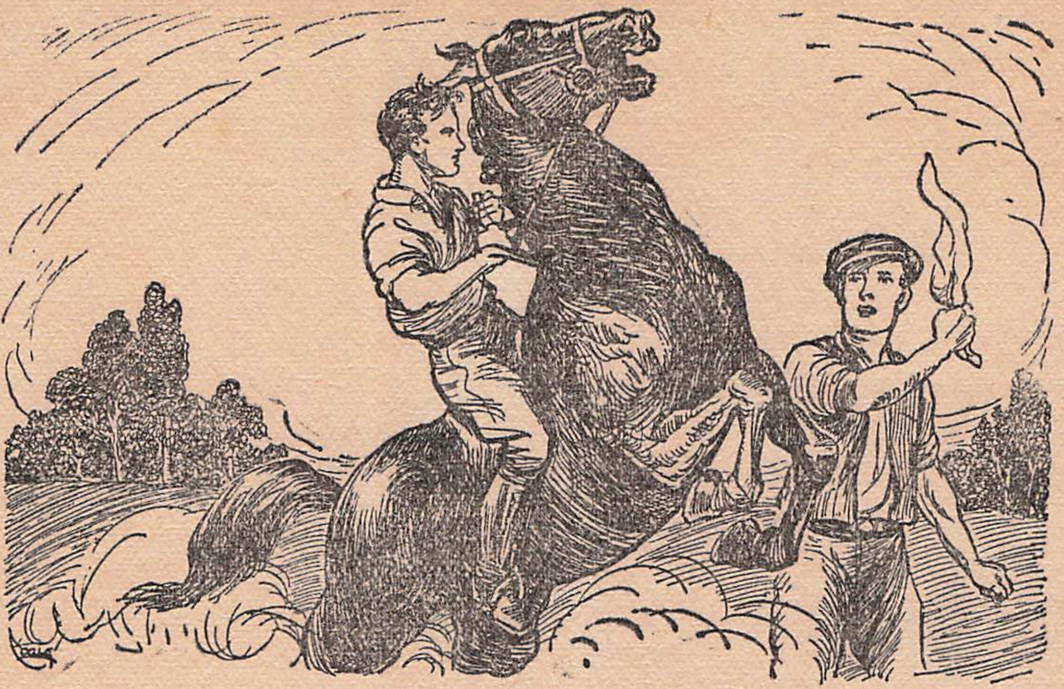
They found the submarine silent as a steel coffin, but their limbs trembled a little perhaps as they committed themselves to the dimly lit interior.

It was in the Ward-Room that they discovered the two engineer officers who had remained on board. Both surrendered at discretion under the menace of Tony's pistol. Roger roped them up and gagged them tight. Then the boys hunted up the watch below, who were in their bunks and therefore unarmed.

Tony handed over the pistol to Roger with strict instructions to shoot at the first sign of trouble from any of the German sailors. Then he searched the submarine for rockets and flares. These he found soon enough and, shortly afterwards, the coast-watching troops were startled by a ghastly green flare which revealed to them the presence of a hostile submarine in Smugglers' Hole Bay, but luckily they picked up Tony's signals also and so did not open fire.

At the same time a patrol of British destroyers, prowling the dark North Sea, began to close on the Yorkshire coast in answer to the urgent summons of the rockets that soared heavenwards, to burst in a galaxy of brilliant balls of fire.

Out of shipwreck had come triumph; and, as the dawn of a new day broke red over the Yorkshire coast, the boys saw the German submarine taken in tow by a British destroyer and the German sailors released from Smugglers' Hole by well-armed soldiers who were not likely to let them escape.



SULTAN FINDS HIS MASTER

"THERE'S a new horse in the home paddock, Tom," said Colonel Turnbull. "He's probably the best 'chaser I've ever purchased; for he can jump, he can stay and he can gallop. In fact, I've reason to believe that he's good enough to win the Grand National, big as are the jumps at Aintree. And yet, I'm not sure that we shan't have a job in finding a rider for him. Gentlemen jockeys are mighty particular, and I can't think of one of them who'd care about riding a horse in blinkers."

"Blinkers, Father?" queried Tom in an incredulous tone, "What on earth makes you think of running a horse in blinkers?"

"You wait until you've seen him, Tom," chuckled the old cavalryman. "He's a beauty to look at, and a beauty to go; but, apparently, he's apt to show the devil's own temper once you take his blinkers off."

"That's rum," Tom answered, "but, blinkers or no blinkers, I wish you'd give me the chance of riding him at Aintree."

"You're over young to ride a horse in the Grand National, as yet, my boy," came the answer, "but it may come to that in the end, if I can't get anyone else to take on the job."

" Let's go and look at him, anyway," Tom suggested, and father and son set out together for the home paddock, followed by a groom carrying a saddle.

" What about a bridle, Father? " Tom queried.

" We have to keep the brute bridled and blinkered all the time," Colonel Turnbull answered. " The man I bought him from warned me that you can't get near him at all when he's got his eyes uncovered."

The Sultan, as the black horse was named, proved to be indeed a beauty. There was power in every line of him, and fire in the red nostrils which opened as he whinnied at their approach.

" Care to throw a leg over him, Tom? " queried the Colonel.

" Rather," came the instant response.

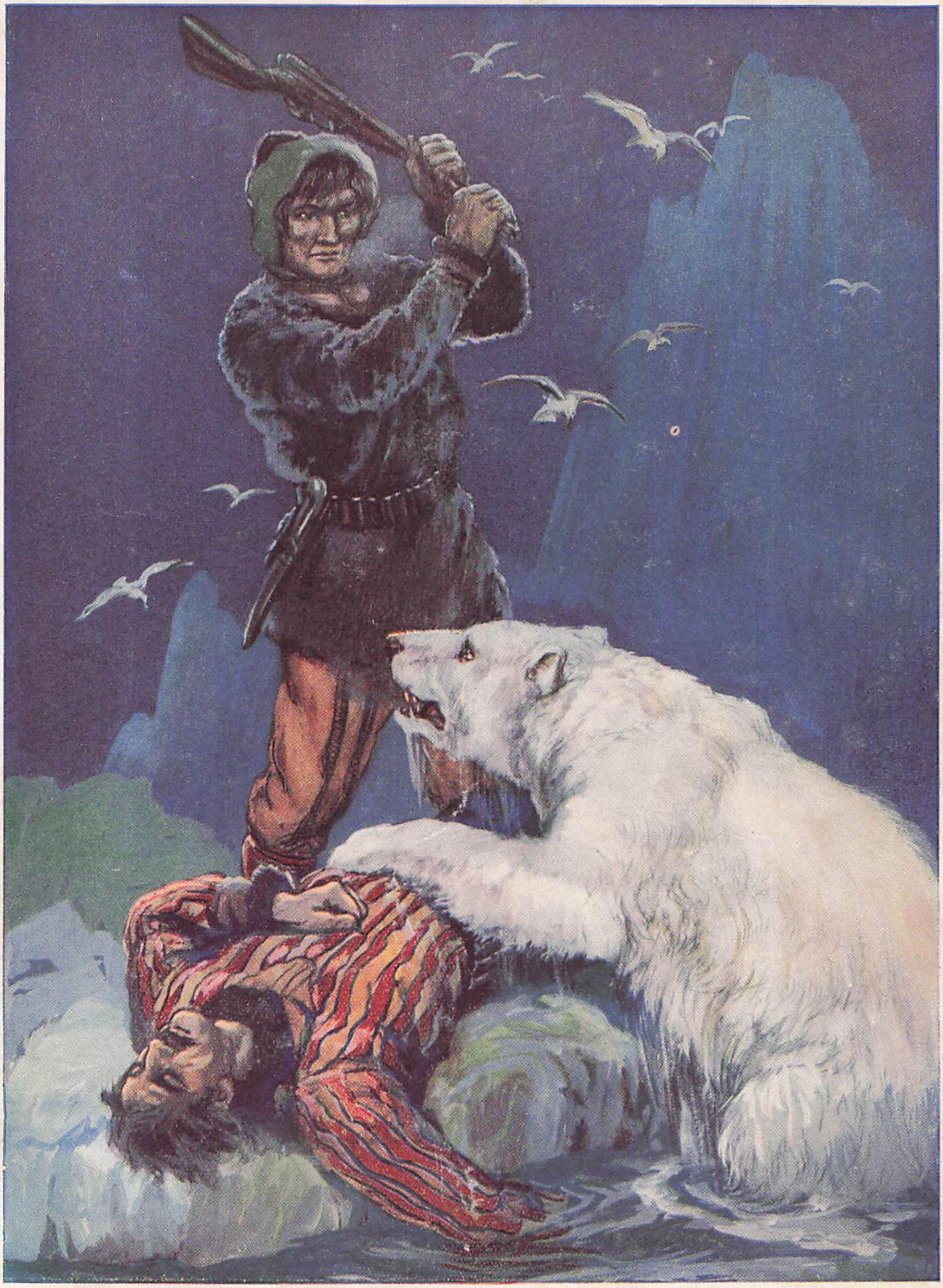
Within five minutes young Tom was in the saddle and putting the Sultan through his paces. That the horse was a marvel there was no doubt. You had only to get across him to feel the tremendous strength that was gripped between your thighs, while the faultless way the big horse fenced was enough to set the onlookers wondering.

Despite all the perfections of the horse, however, Colonel Turnbull's prophecy proved correct. No gentleman jockey would look at a mount for the Grand National which it would be necessary to ride in blinkers. Their objection was not based altogether upon the absurd appearance which a steeplechaser would present turned out like a carriage horse. There was, they said, the far more serious consideration that a horse, handicapped by blinkers, would not be able to see the huge fences he would have to face at Aintree. And so it looked as if the task of riding the Sultan in the great race would devolve upon Tom in the end.

At the first thought of this wonderful honour in store for him the boy's heart glowed with eager anticipation; but, as time went on, he began to brood upon the absurd figure which he believed he would cut, mounted upon a blinkered horse.

Then came the time when the Colonel was called away to London, and temptation assailed Tom.

After all, they had never tried to ride the Sultan without blinkers.



AIUT SNATCHED UP THE WEAPON AND RUSHED AT THE BEAR

They had only the word of the man who had sold them the horse that the Sultan was a rogue when he could see what he was doing. For two days Tom fought the temptation to find out the truth for himself. Then, one morning, when Colonel Turnbull's head-groom had gone into town, the venturesome youngster collected a couple of stable hands as helpers and went down to the home paddock with an open bridle over his arm.

They caught the Sultan without any difficulty, and before they took away his blinkers they bandaged his eyes. Then they saddled him and tied up his off fore-leg to prevent him from playing any tricks before Tom was firmly seated in the saddle. Then came the order " Let him go." At the same moment the bandage was whipped from the horse's eyes and his tied-up leg was released. For a moment he stood stock still, as a great shiver passed through him. An instant later Tom felt as if he was being lifted on the crest of a volcanic eruption, as the Sultan's back arched in one tremendous buck. The boy, however, was not unseated, although severely shaken as the horse came down and propped with all four legs set stiff as iron posts. He tried to drop his head, preparatory to a second buck, but Tom held it up with restraining reins, while his sharp spurs gored the sulky animal's sides. At that insult their was a terrific snort, and the Sultan shot straight up on his hind legs.

Tom knew that rearing trick of old, and he decided upon a daring trick. Just as the horse reached the highest point in his rise Tom yanked him clean over backwards and threw himself clear. Before the partly-winded horse could rise, the boy was back in the saddle and up he came with his mount. Then he spun him down the home field and over the jumps, urging him on with whip and spur, while the stable hands shouted their approval. To them it seemed that the inevitable mastery of the human brain and human courage over mere animal determination had been once more achieved. But the black horse was not at the end of his resources by a long way yet.

At the end of the miniature steeplechase course the Sultan tore off at a tangent in a series of electrifying bucks, which still, however, did not unseat his surprising rider.

SULTAN FINDS HIS MASTER

The black horse was puzzled. Never before had any human being so nearly mastered him. Somewhere in the dim recesses of his equine brain was stirring the determination to die rather than to acknowledge defeat. Colonel Turnbull's park was surrounded by iron railings, far too high to jump, but thin enough for a powerful horse to crash through, and the rider who was thus borne through that barrier would, inevitably, be torn almost to ribbons.

Suddenly the Sultan, who had been standing still, breathing heavily, flung up his head and set off at a mad gallop straight for the park palings.

There was a horrified shout from the onlookers, who realised the terrible danger of their young master. It seemed impossible that he could turn his maddened mount, and even if he flung himself from the saddle there was no doubt that bones would be seriously broken.

Tom's features showed white and strained; for he, too, realised the danger, and, do what he would, he could not turn the horse from the course it had chosen to take. Every instant the railings loomed closer ahead, and then the boy gripped the off side rein in both hands, threw all the weight of his body on to the near side stirrup, until the Sultan's head was dragged round to the right, his fore legs crossed themselves against his will and he came crashing to earth with a terrible impact. Tom was flung far out over the horse's near side shoulder and both rider and mount still lay winded upon the ground when the stable hands came running up.

They would have bandaged the black horse's eyes before he was fully recovered, but Tom gasped out " No, let him see the man who has conquered him."

And, when the black horse rose of his own free will young Tom swung himself up into the saddle once more and again put the horse over the jumps.

The conquest was complete, and when Tom rode the Sultan in the Grand National the horse was without blinkers.

THE PLATE-GLASS PLAYER

"VERY pretty, but he is only a plate-glass player," said Mr. Hedges, as the applause subsided.

Dick Smithson had cut a beautiful ball through the slips for three. The stroke was perfectly produced, with all the power applied to the ball by a fine flick of supple wrists. The timing was accurate to the fraction of a hair.

"What on earth are you grousing about, Hedges?" queried Mr. Travers. "I've seldom seen a finer stroke, even at Lords."

"I admit that," Mr. Hedges answered, "but it is just the very perfection of Smithson's play that makes me doubtful. If you know what I mean, he never seems to take a chance. Have you ever seen him go in and slog when the side was short of runs and there was only a quarter of an hour to play?"

"I agree, up to a point," answered Mr. Travers; "but the fact that he won't run risks can't alter the fact that he is an almost perfect cricketer.

"Well, I like to see a boy put a bit more of the joy of life into his pastimes. It's the same at Rugger. Smithson is, admittedly, the finest stand-off half we've ever had; but, somehow, it always seems to me that he thinks too far ahead. It's as if he knows that there are other matches yet to play and, therefore, he won't run the big risk to win any particular match."

What more the masters might have had to say about the sportsmanship of Dick Smithson must remain for ever a mystery. Just at that moment a frenzied shout, which ran from the pavilion right round the ground, was raised to celebrate the fact that the School captain had driven the ball to the boundary, and that Stanmore School had won the last match of its most successful cricket season.

The masters' remarks, however, were not to be allowed to pass unheeded, for Joe Harris had overheard the conversation, the whole of which he repeated to his pal Dick as they sat at tea, later on, in the study they shared.

At the end of the recital Dick sat silent for some minutes.

"I wonder why old Hedges has always had it in for me?" he mused. "It's just the same in class. I show up my work, decently written and as accurate as I can make it, and yet the beggar's never satisfied. Now take your case, Joe; you shove in a Latin paper smudged from one end to the other with ink and about as far from a correct translation as it's humanly possible for a translation to be and yet Hedges not only grins and bears it, but gives you a pat on the back and tells you to try and do better next time."

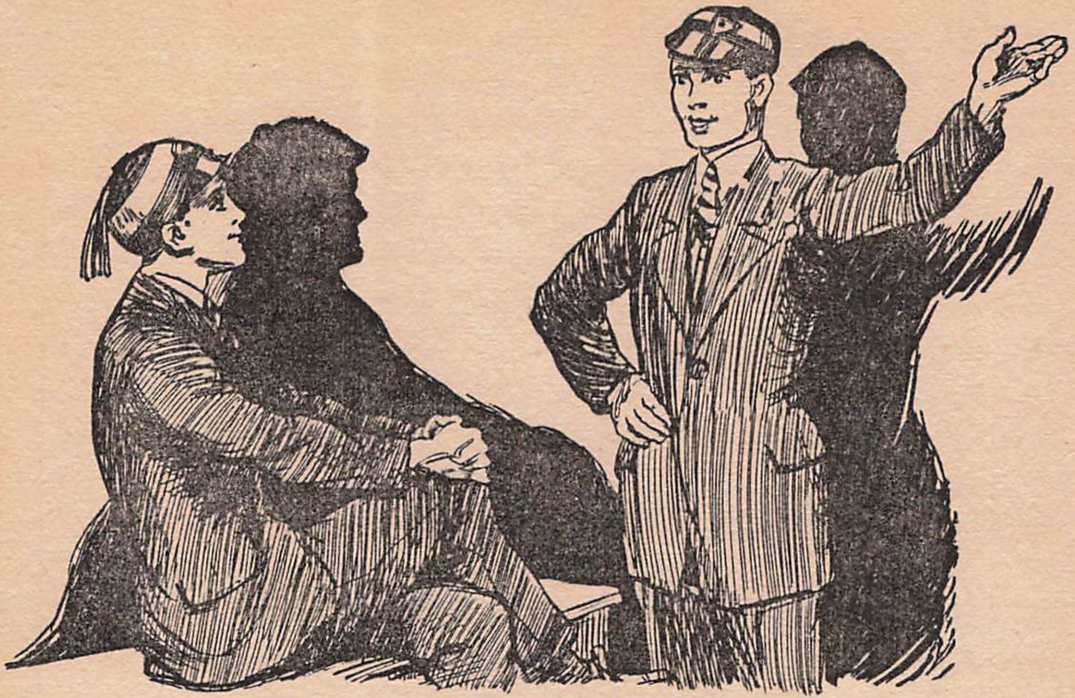
"I suppose he regards your passion for doing things properly as a form of swank," Joe answered.

"All right," said Dick. "I've only one more term at School. We'll see what the Rugger season will produce."

"Going to play to the gallery, eh?"

"Something like that," Dick responded with a smile.

Throughout the long summer holidays Dick Smithson thought often of the conversation his friend had repeated to him. He made up his mind to abandon all his cherished principles, if he could, and to play Rugger with that fiery inaccuracy which seemed to appeal to the spectators. He did not know, however, the difficulty of the task he was undertaking. The boy came of a stock that had been distinguished in the administration of the British Empire for generations past. In a way, much of what Mr. Hedges had said was accurate. Dick Smithson had an inherited genius for looking ahead. Where Rugby was concerned, he played always for the ultimate good of the side and realised, all too clearly, that a spectacular flying tackle, with little probability of bringing down his man and every chance of injuring himself, was no way to secure a successful season for the School. For the rest, he had a peculiar genius for doing things accurately. From his own point of view the thing that mattered was not the number of runs he could score at cricket but the way in which the strokes that secured those runs were produced. Similarly, in athletics, it was not the height, nor the distance, he jumped that interested him mainly; but the accuracy with which he executed the lay-out and turn in the high-jump and the hitch-kick in the



DICK SAT SILENT FOR SOME MINUTES

long jump that really counted in his consideration. These things being so he inevitably produced the best result of which he was mentally and physically capable; but, he got his results in a finicking, " plate-glass " sort of way that proved exasperating to people of the John Blunt, British bull-dog type to which Hedges, the games master at Stanmore, certainly belonged.

When the school reopened and the Rugger season commenced Joe Travers, who played scrum-half for the 1st XV, with Dick at stand-off, reminded his chum of their conversation at the conclusion of the preceding term.

Poor Dick really did do his best to play the game with " bull-in-the-china-shop " zest; but, by long habit, all the while the games were being played his keen mind was concerned with positioning himself to take his scrum-half's passes, while his eyes were ever seeking openings in the enemy's defence.

Mr. Hedges, watching the practice games from the touch-line, rumbled, deep down in his broad chest, " still the plate-glass player."

Then came the first big match of the Public Schools Rugby season, when Stanmore met Brittlehurst on their own ground.

The red jerseys of the Stanmore boys and the all-black kit of the Brittlehurst team covered the successors of fine players of the finest game who had done battle against each other annually since the 'seventies of the last century. Their struggles had been dour and fierce, but always fair, and this year the teams were meeting for a needle battle, since both sides had won an equal number of matches.

The Brittlehurst captain kicked off, but his forwards over-ran the ball and a set scrum was quickly formed at the centre of the ground. The Stanmore pack heeled quickly and keenly, Joe picked up and, as he was tackled by a winging forward, flung a beautiful pass to Dick, who swerved round the breaking scrum and sped straight and true for the Brittlehurst line. Boy after boy tackled him fiercely, but, swerving, side-stepping and handing-off, he raced clean through the defence to score a lovely try smack between the posts, and he converted it himself. Stanmore were 5 points up in the first minute of play.

Brittlehurst, however, resumed the battle with renewed vigour and, after ten minutes, the scores were equal. Then, something seemed to go wrong with the Stanmore team. From the resumption of play the Brittlehurst captain led a thrilling raid of his forwards, with the ball at their feet, right into the Stanmore territory, and when they were racing the full-back for the touch down a wing three-quarter, inadvertently getting in the way, was penalised for obstruction, and three points materialised from the penalty kick.

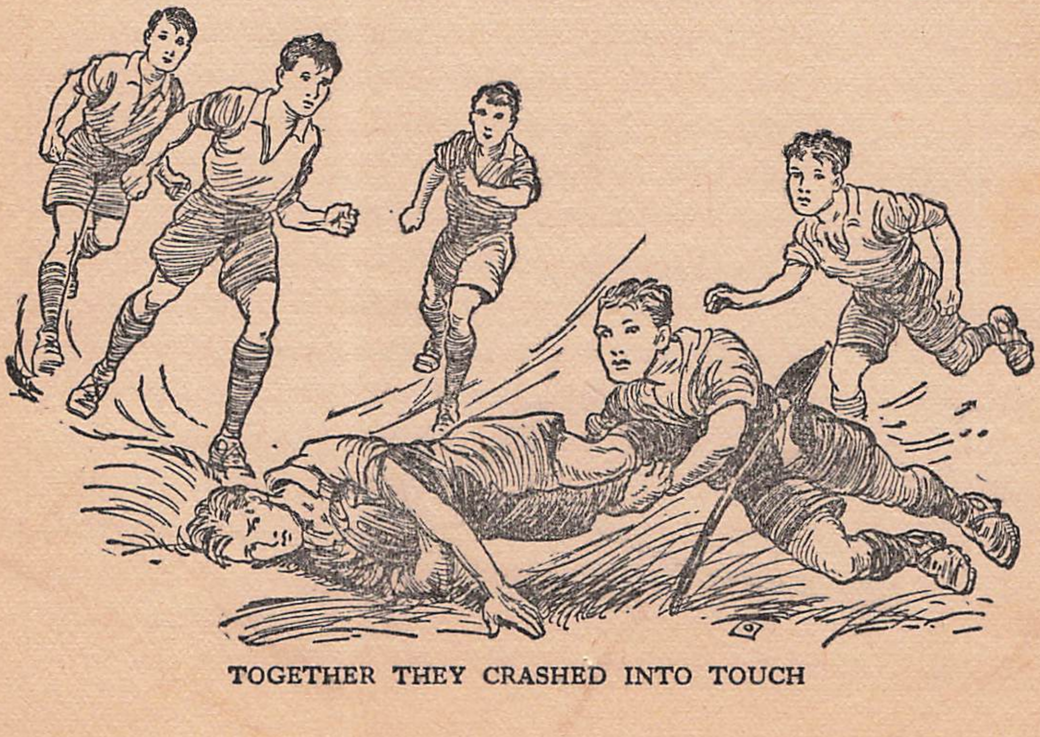
Half-time came with the home side leading 8—5.

Both sides were badly in need of the five minutes' interval, after forty minutes of play that had indeed raged fast and furious. But if the first half had been productive of great Rugby, the second half was to prove an epic of the great game, as played at the best of our Public Schools. Tackling was grim and forceful, the running of the outsides was thrilling and determined and the kicking of both full-backs was long and accurate. Time and again Joe made openings, time and again Dick set his " threes " going and, time and again, they were almost in, when some brilliant piece of defensive play would bring all their valiant efforts to nought.

Then, with only ten minutes to go, Brittlehurst's right wing three-quarter, who was justly famous for his pace, broke away and went racing down the line. A score seemed inevitable, for the Stanmore full-back had been caught clean out of position. Dick, however, turned in his stride and went tearing across the ground to intercept the racing player. The chances looked hopeless, even when the Stanmore stand-off was within yards of his man, for the Brittlehurst wing was almost over the touch-line; but, just as the winger reached the corner of the ground, Dick brought off a flying tackle, with an incredibly long dive, and felt his arms close round the other boy's ankles. Together they crashed into touch, with the shaft of the flag underneath them.

A score had been averted, but when they got to their feet it was seen that the flag post was snapped clean in half and, although he said no word about it, Dick felt an agonising pain in his side that warned him that something had been seriously damaged.

His face was very white and set as he watched the line-out and, moreover, he seemed to find it very difficult to breathe. This was the first match of the season and there were other important fixtures



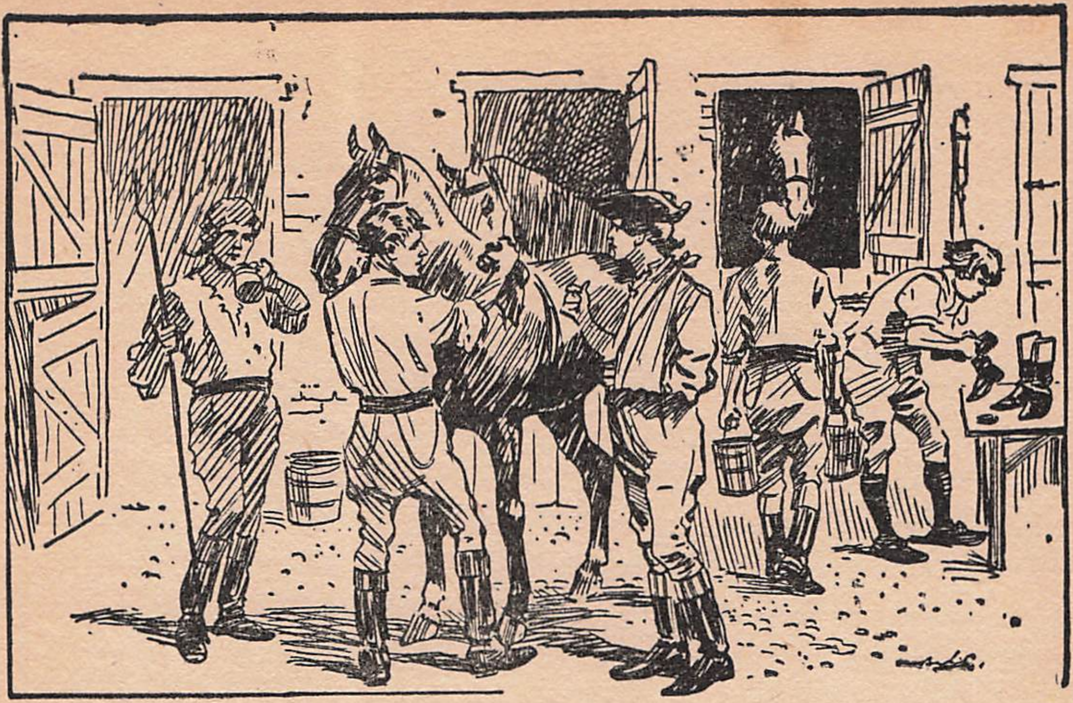
TOGETHER THEY CRASHED INTO TOUCH

to follow. He knew that he ought to go off the ground, more especially as there remained less than five minutes to play and, therefore, the team might not miss him very much, whereas a further injury might put him out of the side for the rest of the season. He was in great pain, but even greater than the pain he suffered was the aggravating memory that Hedges had called him a "plate-glass player."

And, even as the memory of that term of contempt rankled in his mind, Joe banged the ball into his hands. They were in their own "25" then, and the whole length of the ground stretched ahead. Even as he gathered the ball Dick found that he was already in full stride. He drew a deep, gasping breath as he ran, and again that agonising pain shot through his side, but now the delirium of battle entered into his brain. Brittlehurst boys were closing in upon him from all sides; and, although every swerve and every hand-off entailed a separate agony, he still raced up the centre of the ground towards the line.

Now only the full-back remained for him to beat. There was no question of swerving or side-stepping this player, and Dick knew from experience the hopelessness of trying to hand him off. There was one chance in a hundred, and he was determined to take it. His accurate judgment told him that he would be tackled almost on the line, and directly in front of the posts. Stanmore wanted three points to draw—five points to win. Dick might have avoided the back and secured the three points by turning diagonally towards the corner flag, but he meant to give his side the winning goal and so kept straight on. He felt the tackle coming from the left; then strong arms were crushing his ribs with the sharp pain of a sword thrust; but, even as they closed upon him, he hurled himself forward and, with hands outstretched, grounded the ball just over the Brittlehurst line.

A Stanmore forward added the extra points and the School had won the all-important match, but the "plate-glass player" had fought out the last ten minutes and had scored the winning try with three broken ribs stabbing sharply into his side.



NO GOING BACK

IT was the morning of the opening meet of the fox-hunting season in the year 1715 and, despite the recent troubles in the Midlands and rumours of fresh Jacobite risings, about to take place in the North and in Scotland, all Northumberland was willing to let politics go hang for the sake of the finest sport upon earth.

Tom Goodman, head groom to Colonel Swaine, and his satellites, had been up since long before dawn, for there was a final polish to be put upon boots and saddlery and gleaming equine coats, and there were instructions to be given to second horseman; for the Colonel was taking a party out hunting, and Tom, by reason of a broken left arm was not able to go with them to see that grooms and stable boys got their masters' spare mounts to the right places at the proper times.

At the last moment there proved to be another absentee. For Claud Swaine sent word to his father, who was breakfasting sparingly on a couple of boiled eggs, that he was unwell and would not hunt that day.

It was with a keen sense of disappointment that Tom watched the party mount and ride away from the door, for he had been looking forward for months past to this, the opening meet of the season.

Most of the morning he wandered disconsolately about the stables, calling down curses upon the broken arm that kept him at home. Towards noon, however, he imagined that he heard the toot of a far-off hunting horn and, calling a lad to saddle a quite old horse for him, he rode out to a near-by hill to see if he might catch a sight of the hunt streaming past.

As things turned out he did not see the hunt, but caught a glimpse of a spectacle far more intriguing. Some half mile from the hill was situated a disused quarry, very seldom visited and into this place the head groom saw a troop of horse go riding two by two and, in the head-dress of each trooper, his keen eyes discerned the cockade of the Pretender. For a while longer he watched and was rewarded by the sight of Captain Murray leaving the quarry. Now this Captain Murray, who was a great crony of Claud Swaine's, had but recently returned to England from service in the army of King Louis of France. He was suspected of harbouring Jacobite sympathies and his influence over his young friend was very great.

Tom did not spare his ancient mount as he rode hard for the manor house. The Colonel's son was already at table when the groom arrived and hard upon his heels came Captain Murray.

There was neither time nor the opportunity for Tom to speak to his young master, but he was suspicious that something untoward was afoot. He crept quietly up to the minstrel's gallery, and settled himself to listen to the conversation in the dining-hall below.

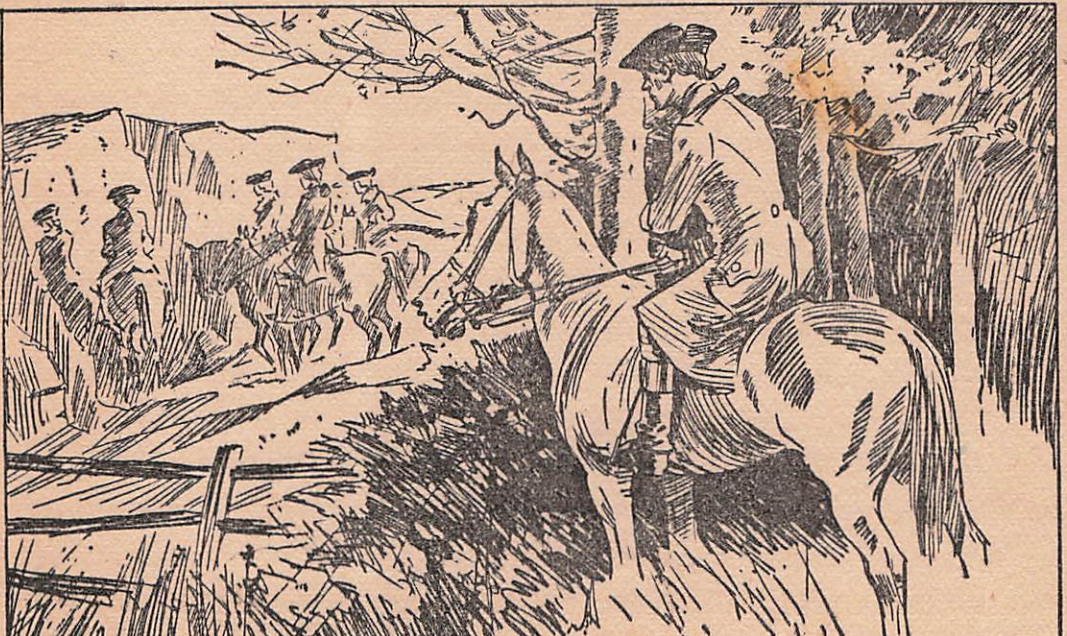
In the space of the next half hour Goodman realised that his worst suspicions were justified. Captain Murray was reminding Claud Swaine that he was involved in the Jacobite plot beyond hope of withdrawal, and was urging him to march that very day to join the Earl of Derwentwater and Mr. Foster, who were about to raise the Pretender's standard at Alnwick; while the Highlanders, under the Earl of Mar, would rise simultaneously in Scotland.

Claud protested weakly, but there was no doubt that the stronger will of the elder man must prevail in the end. The final argument used by Captain Murray was that the local troop should actually set out from the Manor House. This ruse, he declared, would commit Colonel Swaine to King James's cause, which, despite the Colonel's protests and stern words to his son, Murray vowed was not altogether distasteful to the older soldier.

Claud, only too willing to be convinced, at last gave way and Murray, in high fettle, departed to give the main body of his troop the order to march.

"I will bring back with me," he said, "a sergeant and an escort of half a dozen troopers for ourselves. We can overtake the rest before they reach the place of general assembly appointed by Lord Derwentwater."

Up in the gallery the head groom, who had served under Colonel Swaine in Coy's Horse, smiled sourly. The motto of his old regiment had run, *Vestigia nulla retrorsum*, "There is no going back," and, in this present case, there was not going to be any going



FOR A WHILE LONGER HE WATCHED

back either. For he had gathered from the recent conversation that Master Claud had given the Colonel a tacit undertaking to drop his connection with the Jacobites.

As the young man crossed the hall to the staircase, Goodman faded away as silently as a shadow. As the youth entered his bedchamber, to prepare himself for the road, and the door swung to behind him, he heard a slight sound—like the click of a lock or the rise of a pistol hammer—which caused him to turn swiftly.

Claud Swaine found himself staring into the black muzzle of a big horse-pistol. It was held in a rock-steady hand and backed by the cold, uncompromising eyes of the ex-trooper of Coy's Horse.

"Sorry, sir," he said, "but it can't be done. Colonel, he'd rather see you dead than turned traitor. You've given him your word and you're planning to break it—and that can't be done neither. And so, sir, seeing as how I've only one arm to use, I'll trouble you to open the door and go before me to a place where you can be kept safe. I'll answer to Captain Murray when he comes back with his troopers."

The old soldier clicked his heels and stood up more stiffly than ever, to indicate that he had finished what was probably the longest speech he had ever made.

For the next ten minutes young Swaine stormed and argued and finally pleaded, but neither threats nor entreaties took the slightest effect upon Tom Goodman. When the other paused, for very lack of breath, he said quietly, but firmly:

"Now come along, sir. If I can get rid of Captain Murray and his men quickly, I'll promise to release you before the Colonel comes back from hunting."

With a hopeless gesture, Claud surrendered and passed out of the room in front of his captor. But when they reached the far end of the passage he stopped and started back. Goodman, he realised, was about to commit him to the dark priest's-hole, the secret of which he had believed to be known to his father and himself alone. Perhaps, after all, the headgroom knew only the whereabouts of the hiding place, since he requested Claud to press the concealed spring. Or perhaps that circumstance was due to the fact that he had a pistol in his right hand, while his broken left arm hung useless in its sling.

His prisoner safely deposited, Goodman thrust the pistol into the skirt pocket of his coat and went downstairs. Captain Murray was returning up the avenue already, followed by a sergeant and six troopers.

Goodman called sharply to a passing scullion and stood breathing urgent instructions into his ear for some moments. As the man stole away from the back of the house the old soldier turned to meet the Jacobites.

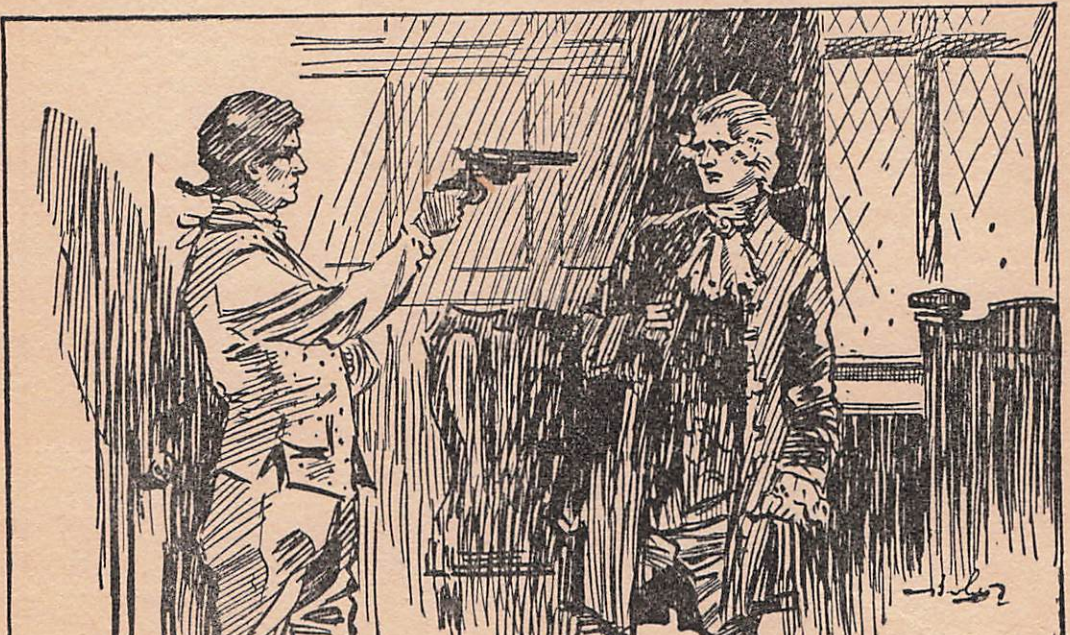
"Where is your master? Why isn't his horse saddled and waiting?" demanded Captain Murray.

"Master's been away hunting, since soon after breakfast, sir."

"Not the Colonel, fool. It is Mr. Claud I mean."

"Ah, Mr. Claud went out some minutes since, sir."

Captain Murray's eyes narrowed and his jaw set itself in a firm line. To the groom he said, "Stay where you are"; his own



IT WAS HELD IN A ROCK-STEADY HAND

sergeant he ordered to make enquiries as to how long Mr. Claud Swaine had been gone, and in which direction he had departed.

Tom Goodman dared not touch the pistol in his pocket; but, inch by inch, he edged his way nearer to a trophy of arms hanging upon the wall.

"Won't you come into the house and await the return of Mr. Claud, sir?" he enquired. But Captain Murray's only reply was an impatient shake of the head. He seemed to be listening intently all the time, and never took his eyes off Goodman's face.

Just before the Jacobite sergeant returned, a trim serving maid crossed the hall. Murray stopped her.

"Where's Mr. Claud?"

"An't please you, sir," she answered, dropping a curtsey, "the young master went above stairs some time past."

Murray turned upon Tom with a sour smile, but before he could speak his sergeant reappeared.

"No one's seen the young gentleman leave the premises, sir," he reported.

"Very good, sergeant. Take three men and round up the outdoor servants. The other three will remain with me to search the house."

The sergeant detailed his men and led them off to the stables, but when Captain Murray turned to enter the Manor House, he found his way barred by ex-Trooper Goodman.

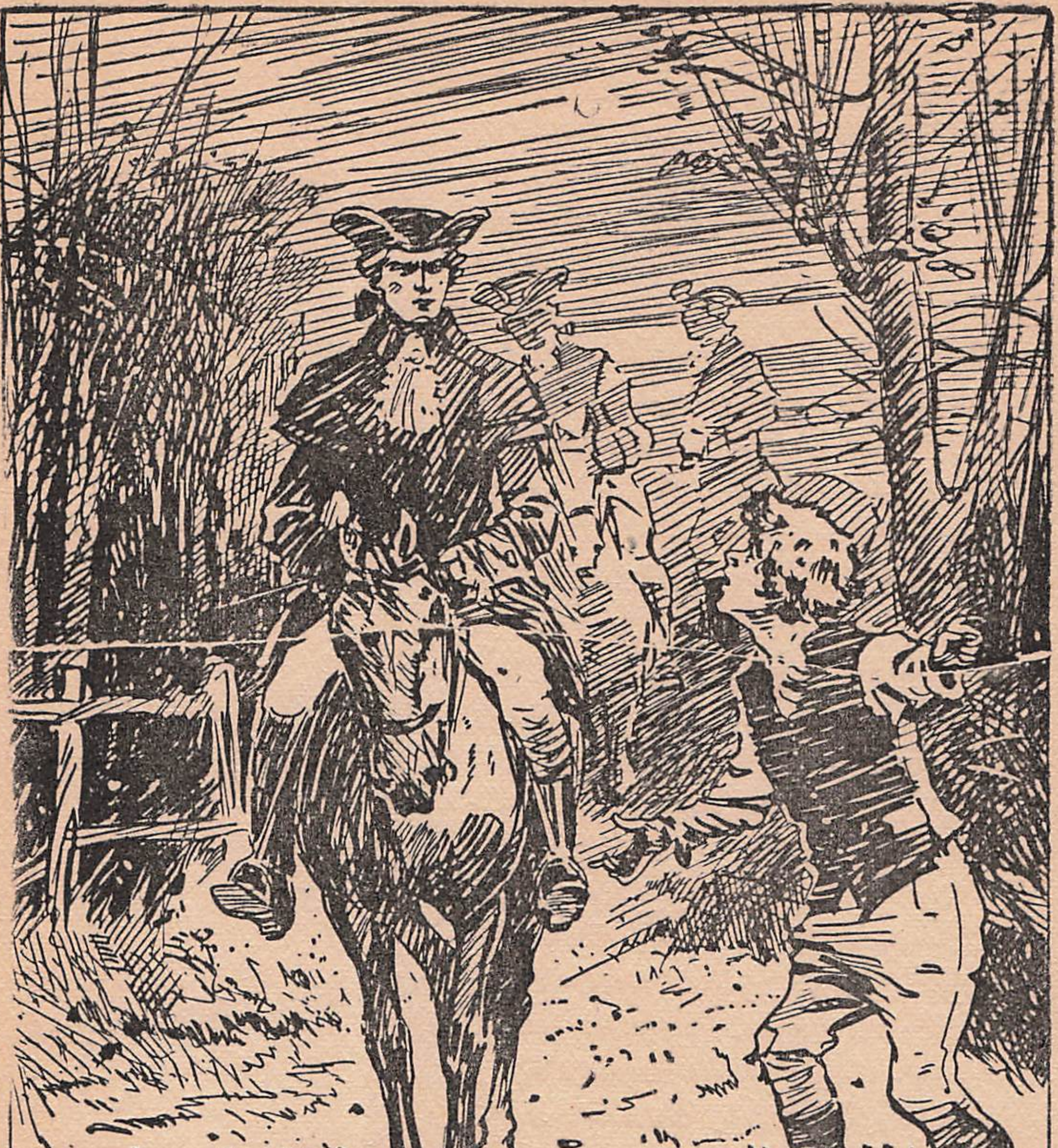
"I'm sorry, sir," he said, firmly but politely, "but I have told you that both Colonel Swaine and Mr. Claud are from home. In their absence I shall certainly not allow you to search the house, unless you can show me a warrant entitling you to do so."

Captain Murray touched the cockade in his hat.

"The badge of King James III is my warrant; stand aside," he answered.

Thereupon, Tom Goodman sprang nimbly back and snatched down a sabre from a shield of arms.

"You enter at your peril and only over my dead body," he announced.



"THEY REBELS BE COME TO TH' MANOR HOUSE!"

"I think not," answered the Jacobite leader. "I fancy you know where Claud Swaine has hidden himself. We're going to take you alive and make you tell."

As Captain Murray, followed by his three troopers, sprang into the hall Tom Goodman fell on guard. The fight that followed was brief and bloody, for Tom had heard the order that the Jacobites were to use only the flat of their blades to beat him down; and so, himself, fought hard to wound and kill.

Two men he sent staggering back, to nurse deep flesh wounds; but, driving his point hard into the breast of the third trooper, he failed to disengage his blade quickly enough to prevent Captain Murray from stunning him with the pommel of his sword.

Before the search of the house commenced they bore the old soldier to the library and trussed him up tightly.

. . . . .

Colonel Swaine and his guests had enjoyed a great day's hunting and were jogging steadily homewards at the tireless hound trot, which eats up the miles, when they found themselves confronted suddenly by a wild figure which sprang from a spinney by a cross-road.

"Your honour, oh, your honour!" panted the man, "they rebels be come to th' Manor House!"

The Colonel looked hard at the messenger, in the gathering gloom of the autumn evening, but failed to recognise him; until an excited young groom burst out.

"Why, it's Meek, the scullion."

"Yes, an't please your honour, I'm Meek," confirmed the man. "Master Goodman sent me to bring you warning. He said as how they rebels is after Master Claud, sir."

At that news the Colonel's whole attitude changed. He turned eagerly to Lord Dasent, who rode at his side.

"Can you arm my party at your place, Dasent?"

"Aye, Swaine, gladly, and will accompany you with my own people to the Manor House after. So it's come at last, has it, and we are to witness once more the horrors of civil war?"

"I fear so," the Colonel answered; "but we can, at least, despatch a messenger to carry a warning to General Carpenter, who commands King George's forces."

"Poor Derwentwater," said Lord Dasent, as they galloped along; "he hath been openly for James, since Mar raised the Pretender's standard in Scotland a week ago, but he is only a boy, Swaine, scarce seven-and-twenty yet, and, 'tis said, the taunts of his wife have driven him to this suicidal course."

"'Tis Foster is the villain of the piece," the Colonel answered. "My boy, Claud, and Derwentwater have been bosom friends from childhood, and I fear Foster has played on my son's mind as well."

"Aye, and on the minds of half a hundred other foolish Northumbrians besides," Lord Dasent answered.

. . . . .

Darkness had fallen by the time the party, armed and augmented in numbers by their visit to Lord Dasent's mansion, approached the vicinity of the Manor House.

Colonel Swaine, once again the eager and efficient soldier of the Lowland days, divided his forces. One party he sent to secure the chargers of the Jacobite troopers, if they were still in the stables. With the rest he advanced to surround the house.

All was quiet and very dark, save for a star of light which shone from the library window. Thither Colonel Swaine, Lord Dasent and three companions made their way.

The curtains were not drawn and the spectacle that met their eyes was a strange one.

Tom Goodman was stood, rocking slightly on his feet, with the calves of his legs close to a blazing log-fire. Before him stood two troopers, the points of their swords touching his breast, so that he could by no means escape the heat, which was torturing him, without impaling himself upon those menacing sword-points. At a table, drawn close to the fireside, sat Captain Murray, leaning upon his arms, his fierce, hawk-like face thrust forward and his lips moving from time to time.

Over and over he repeated one sentence, until poor Tom believed that he must go mad by reason of the very monotony of that pitiless rain of words.

"You shall tell me where Captain Swaine is hidden."

Like drops of water falling constantly upon a stone, those words were slowly, but inexorably, eating into Tom Goodman's sternly set determination not to speak.

The spectators gazed in horror for a moment upon this scene of degraded brutality. Then the windows were burst in with a crash and the trapped Jacobites whirled round to find themselves confronting an impenetrable wall of steel sword-blades, above which fiercely angry eyes glared out at them.

Tom Goodman uttered one swift exclamation of triumph, then crumpled up on the hearthstone in an unconscious heap.

"By virtue of my office of Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland, I arrest you and your men, Captain Murray," thundered Lord Dasent.

The soldier of fortune drew his sword and snapped the blade between his hands, then stood there, arms folded, lips lilting a Jacobite air, as the King's men closed in upon him.

Slowly they brought poor Goodman back to his senses and, from his lips, they learned the whole tale; but so evilly had he been handled that he did not leave his bed until the Pretender's standard had been raised in Alnwick and Hexham and the Jacobite forces finally routed at Sheriffmuir and Preston.

JUNGLE RESCUE

NEITHER Jim nor I cared a lot about Basil Sinclair, although he was our chum Tony Bassett's cousin and had the very deuce of a reputation as an airman.

Sinclair had served under Tony's father, Squadron-Leader Bassett, for a time but, apparently, got tired of the R.A.F. and chucked in his hand.

After that he went round the country with one of the big flying circuses doing stunts for the best part of a year, but got sick of that, too. Then some big manufacturing company had offered to finance him and he had carried out a sensational "Round the Equator" record flight which provided the papers with plenty of news.

He did not, however, tell the Press reporters all the details of his record flight, as we were to learn later on.

Jim and I were spending part of the holidays at the Bassetts' place when Sinclair came down to see Tony's father, who had just been made a Group-Captain and was no end set up about his promotion. That was why we found it so hard to understand how on earth Sinclair had succeeded in persuading Tony's pater to leave the Service.

Tony was hopping-wild when he heard the news and thought his pater must have gone potty.

" Why, Bill, old man," he said to me, " the Guv'nor would have been an Air-Commodore next and was almost bound to end up as an Air Marshal. What trick d'you think that knave Basil has pulled on him to put the bats in his belfry this way? "

Neither Jim nor I had any suggestions to offer. The next thing we heard was that Group-Captain Bassett and his nephew had purchased a couple of 'planes and were about to set out on some mystery flight, without giving even a hint of their destination to a living soul.

Tony's mother was in a frightful way about it, but there was worse to follow. After three months had gone by without a scrap of news, Basil Sinclair came back alone. The story he told was that Tony's poor old pater had been forced down, owing to engine trouble, and that when Sinclair himself had effected a difficult landing he had found his uncle's 'plane with the engine stone cold and absolutely conked out. but not a single, blessed sign of Group Captain Bassett.

The Air Ministry and all sorts of big pots looked into the business, Tony told me, but they could not get any kind of clear statement from Sinclair as to just where the accident had occurred.

At the end of that year we all left school. Tony went up to Cambridge, instead of entering Cranwell, as had been intended, because Mrs. Bassett, now, did not want him to take a commission in the R.A.F.

My brother Jim and I went home to our father's *shamba* (farm), on the borders of Uganda and Kenya Colony.

We kept up a pretty regular correspondence with Tony and often thought of him, because there was an aerodrome on the shores of a big lake not a hundred miles away and it was no unusual sight to see an air-liner or a seaplane passing overhead.

I don't think Tony missed writing by a single mail, but I am afraid we weren't such regular correspondents. You see, there was a tremendous lot to do, helping Dad on the *shamba*, and some of the neighbouring tribes were none too friendly. Besides, we had been allowed to begin big-game hunting and Jim—the lucky beggar—had bagged his first lion.

The new life altered both of us a whole lot, I fancy, and we began to forget our rather sheltered school days in England, because the chap who can't look after himself and keep his end up in Central Africa is apt to find that the only service he is likely to need from other folk is the final task of planting him nice and safely in six feet of soil, with a heap of stones atop, to keep the hyenas from digging him up.

If it had not so happened that Jim and I had both cut our wisdom teeth and learned to make quick decisions, things might have gone pretty badly when the big emergency came along a bit later.

When the call came, Dad had gone down country to Nairobi to see about some new agricultural machinery he had ordered from England, and Jim was taking advantage of the Old Man's absence to slack it in bed a good deal later than usual. I had finished breakfast and was lounging on the verandah, wondering whether I dare tackle a pipe, since I was thinking that it was about time for me to take up smoking, when I spotted a native coming across the plains in the direction of our bungalow.

At first glance I mistook the boy for Hamesi Ali, the mail-runner, since a squint through the field glasses we always kept hanging in the verandah showed me that he was carrying a wand in his right hand, with what looked like an envelope stuck in the cleft at the top of the stick. I shouted to Jim and he joined me before the boy arrived.

He turned out to be a proper *shenzi* (wild native). He could neither read nor write, of course, and was as timid as a jackal. The note he pushed towards me at the end of his stick, he said he had picked up just after an *Ndege-na-hewa* (Bird-of-the-Air) had passed over and that a Hindu trader had told him he would probably get a reward of a rupee by bringing the *barua* (letter) to us.

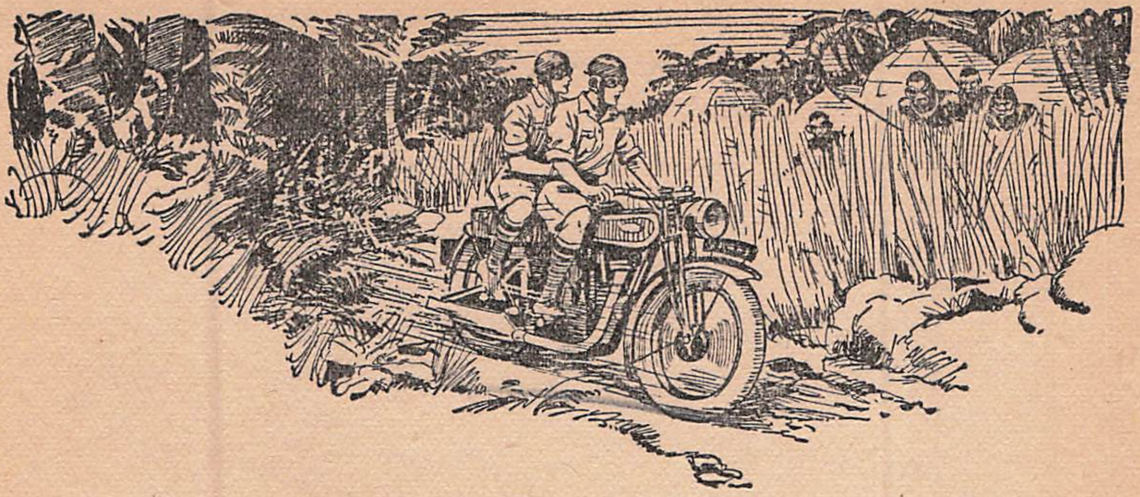
I tossed the fellow a chip and tore open the envelope. Then I nearly tumbled off the top rail of the verandah clean into the garden. That letter was from Tony and, if what the native said was true, it had been dropped from an aeroplane, probably the very machine we had seen flying high towards the mountains just before sunset yesterday.

"*Have news of father, but fear treachery*," Tony had written in a shaky hand. "*Follow, if you can, White Moth seaplane—identification scarlet A.Z.* 3952. *Tony*."

It *was* the machine we had seen overnight.

Jim, who had read the mysterious note over my shoulder, dashed into the bungalow, shouting to Kathuka to fill water bottles and pack food into a couple of haversacks. He himself fetched our revolvers and a supply of ammunition, while I bolted to the shed where we kept an ancient motor cycle. There was a road, of sorts, across the mountains and there wouldn't be a native for a hundred miles who would not be able to tell us which way the seaplane had flown.

The roads running south from the *shamba* and the tracks we had made across our farm were none too bad for motor cycling, but the road to the north was known to us only by repute.



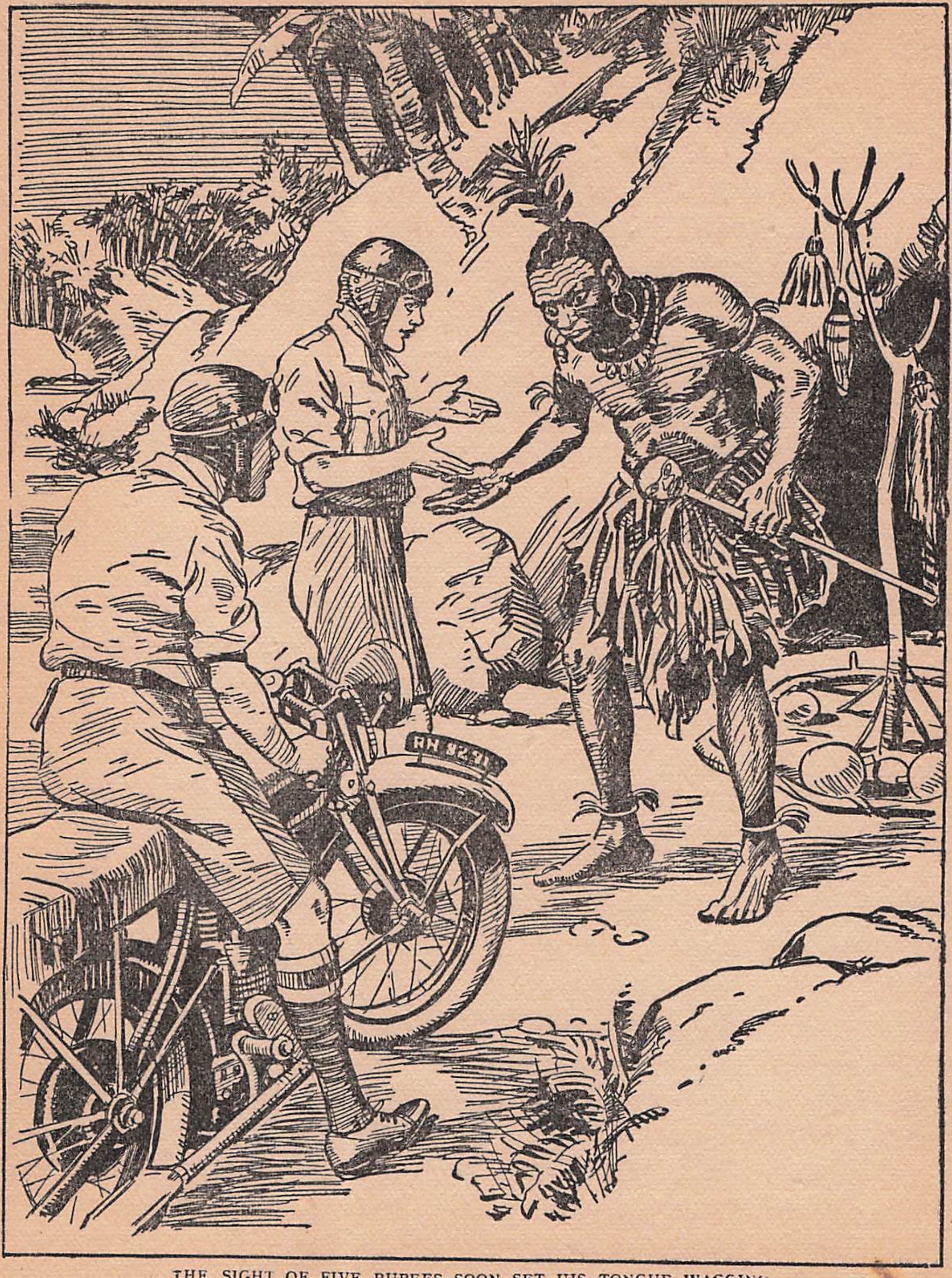
JIM DROVE THE FIRST STRETCH

We found it absolutely wicked. Jim drove the first stretch, and although I strove to keep my eyes fixed on the sky they were nearly jolted out of my head and I got a crick in the neck which was paralysing. For perhaps a hundred miles every native we stopped to question was able and willing to give us full information concerning the flight of the "*Ndege-na-hewa*." But the few people who dwelt among the desolate, tumbled wastes of the high mountains, where the only vegetation is giant lobelia, taller than a man's head, although chatty enough on all other subjects, shut up like a lot of clams when we started asking questions about the seaplane.

We learned the reason for the stubborn, sullen silence of the natives upon that particular subject from an old witch-doctor. He inhabited a cave close to where the alleged Northern road petered out into a mere stony footpath.

This old man, apparently, had seen so much of life and had acquired such a hold over the local tribes, that he feared neither gods, men nor devils. What he worshipped was wealth and the sight of five rupees soon set his tongue wagging.

"Yesterday, *Bwana*," he said, "the air-bird, of which you speak passed over and, behold, a strange thing happened. Suddenly, as we watched, one fell from the great bird. We said, 'Ha, that one is already among the dead,' but over him there spread presently that which was



THE SIGHT OF FIVE RUPEES SOON SET HIS TONGUE WAGGING like an *mwavuli* (umbrella). Thereupon his hurtling fall was checked and he floated gently earthwards until he vanished beyond yonder peak which is fashioned in the shape of a spear."

Shading our eyes we stared towards the pinnacle of rock pointed out by our informant. Bill wheeled the motor-bicycle into the witch-doctor's cave. No words were needed, for the road we must take would be hard enough to travel on foot.

Toiling as we had never done before, we reached the summit of the peak before sunset. Below us lay the crater of an extinct volcano. In the centre the waters of a vast lake reflected redly the last rays of the setting sun. The slopes of that natural pit were covered with deep jungle, but here and there smoke rose lazily from cooking fires in native villages.

" Bill," my brother said solemnly, " I reckon we've stumbled on to one of those lost African tribes which no white man has ever visited."

" Well, Dad has always told us that these mountains were mainly unexplored," I answered.

It was hopeless to think of reaching the shores of the lake that evening. In Central Africa there is no twilight and the curtain of darkness descends with surprising suddenness as soon as the sun is out of sight. What we endured that night neither Jim nor I care to remember, for our shirts and shorts of thin tropical khaki twill were no protection against the bitter cold which obtained at the altitude of the peak which was shaped like a spear.

First peep of day found us descending the slope of the mountain slowly, for our muscles were stiff with the cold of the night. We moved faster, but with extreme caution, through the sweltering heat of the tropical jungle surrounding the lake.

A furious beating of *ngomas* (native drums) gave us our direction, until even that unholy din was overlaid by a greater roaring which grew louder every instant as a great seaplane came swooping down from the sky.

" Is it reinforcements, or what? " queried Jim in a whisper.

" Goodness knows," I answered. " If it was Tony who made the parachute descent and Basil Sinclair who is flying the 'plane, it looks as though the next few hours will be pretty hectic, not to say highly complicated."

A moment later the roar of the aero-engines diminished to a whine as the seaplane descended to the surface of the lake where it was out of our sight. The din of the orgy going on in the native village grew greater every instant.

" I don't like that racket," Jim muttered, " sounds to me as if the natives are working themselves up for a killing. We'd better see who's arrived in that seaplane."

We changed direction and made for the shore of the lake. A big, white air-craft rode silent on the surface, but the man who had flown it was absent.

" Well," I shouted, for the thunder of the drums was deafening, " do we join the party? "

Jim nodded and led the way through the lake-side fringes of the jungle. We covered the last lap on hands and knees, but suddenly we stopped, frozen stiff with horror.

In an open space, backed by rows of beehive-shaped huts, stood a totem pole, round which a party of savages were capering. To that post Tony Bassett was bound and around him, knee-high, faggots lay piled, ready for kindling.

Even as we watched, a woman, who had been twirling a pointed stick between her palms, rose from her knees and passed a blazing brand to a shouting warrior. Jim drew his revolver and the savage fell. Without waiting for an instant I also opened fire.

The savages, surprised and totally ignorant of the size of the force attacking their village, fled through the huts and took to the jungle. We knew, however, that the respite would be brief. They would have watchers at the edge of the forest and those warriors seeing only two boys emerge would quickly recall their comrades.

Jim and I had our hunting knives in our hands as we dashed across the clearing and within a space of minutes Tony was free. The poor chap, however, could not stand, so tight had been his bonds. I managed to get him across my shoulders with a sudden fireman's lift and, Jim following behind to beat off any sudden attack, we made our way to where the canoes belonging to the village lay beached.

" What happens next? " I gasped, as I dumped Tony, who had been no light weight to carry.

Before either of the others could answer a fusillade of shots rang out, followed by wild shouts of triumph, then came an abyssmal silence.

" I fancy they've got Basil," said Tony, with what seemed to me appalling callousness, until I heard the rest of the story. " The poor old pater is somewhere in this part of the world," he went on, " He put up the money for an expedition to hunt for a big treasure Basil had got wind of. They found it all right, but as Basil was only due for a quarter share he put the Gov'nor's 'plane out of action and left the dear old chap in the lurch."

" What did he hope to get out of that? " Jim demanded.

" Well, you see," said Tony, when we had climbed into the sea-plane, " he got me to accompany him on a flight to find the treasure and we were actually flying over Africa when he let it out that the pater is still alive and that he intended using me as a hostage to secure the whole of the treasure for himself. That was why I jumped with the parachute, when I got the chance."

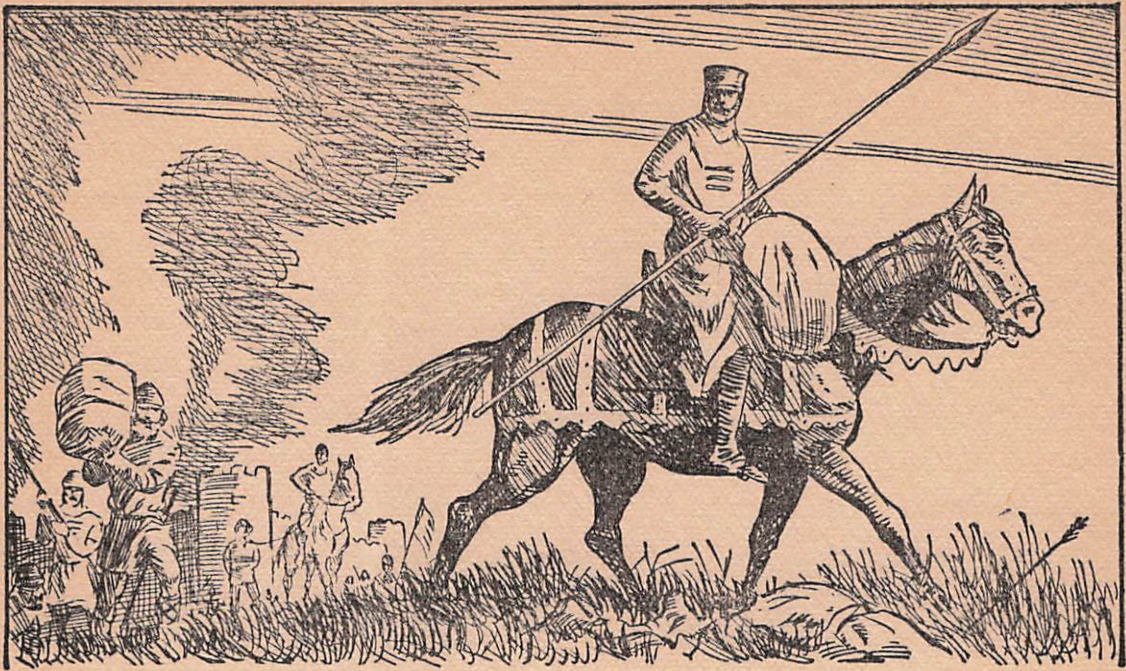
" I say, the natives are coming down to the shore," Jim intervened.

Tony moved into the cock-pit and pressed the self-starter.

" Lucky I joined the Auxiliary Air Squadron at Cambridge," he said quietly, as he moved the joy-stick.

Jim was all for flying straight to the aerodrome on the Great Lake for help, but I knew that it would need a large, armed force to penetrate the mountain strongholds, and so we sought once more the witch-doctor who had helped us previously.

It needed a pretty big bribe and the promise of an even larger reward to get the old scoundrel going. But he certainly had got the low-down on those local tribes, and within a week we managed to retrieve Tony's father from his place of concealment, and also secured the bulk of the treasure that had been discovered.



HOW HALLOWDOWN WAS SAVED

THIS is a tale of the evil days when King Stephen and Empress Matilda fought for the crown of England. Never before had there been such wretchedness in the land, for the king's foreign soldiers pillaged wherever they went, and the barons laid taxes on the peasants continually, calling it *tenserie*. When the wretched people had no more to give they robbed and burned the villages, so that you might easily fare a whole day's journey and never find a man living in a village, or land being tilled. Famine was everywhere, and some went begging alms who had once been rich men, and those who could fled out of the land. Churches and monasteries were sacked along with the villages and towns, and people said in despair that Christ and his saints slept.

Yet in the midst of this misery, we in Hallowdown fared well, for my uncle took no part in the civil war, but held his castle with threescore men-at-arms and bowmen, and drubbed all those who came to steal our kine and pigs, or, if they were too strong to be beaten off, bribed them to leave us in peace.

Although he could speak scarce a word of English—being too impatient to learn that tongue—his Saxon serfs as well as his Norman men-at-arms called him "Good Sir Robert," and no man but had gladly risked his life for him.

But in the end we were drawn into the war. For years my uncle's overlord, Ranulf of Born—a crafty man who boasted that he had rather use his wits than his sword—had held aloof from the struggle, making pretence from time to time that he was on the point of joining either King Stephen or Empress Matilda. Ranulf of Born could put five thousand men into the field, wherefore both the king's party and the Empress's supporters were anxious to win him to their cause, and in turn each party tried to buy his support. But they could offer him for payment naught more solid than promises of rewards that should be his when they had conquered their enemies, and Ranulf would have none of these. In the end, however, Matilda made him a grant of the lands of Richard of Belesme, which she had declared forfeit when he joined the king's cause.

Richard had lately been slain in a skirmish near his own castle, and his next-of-kin, a nephew, had not yet come to Belesme to claim his inheritance, being at the time of his uncle's death with Stephen's army. The grant of lands meant no more than this, that if Ranulf of Born were strong enow to take and hold them he might do so, and if the Empress prevailed over Stephen she would confirm him in his possession, provided that he sent her five hundred men-at-arms to fight in her army.

Believing that here at last was a chance to gain something by joining in the war, Ranulf prepared to seize Belesme castle and the rich lands around it. So he called upon his tenants for the military services that were his due. Also he promised that it should be an easy task to seize the lands of Belesme, and that when they were his he would make generous grants of fat manors to all those who helped him win the prize.

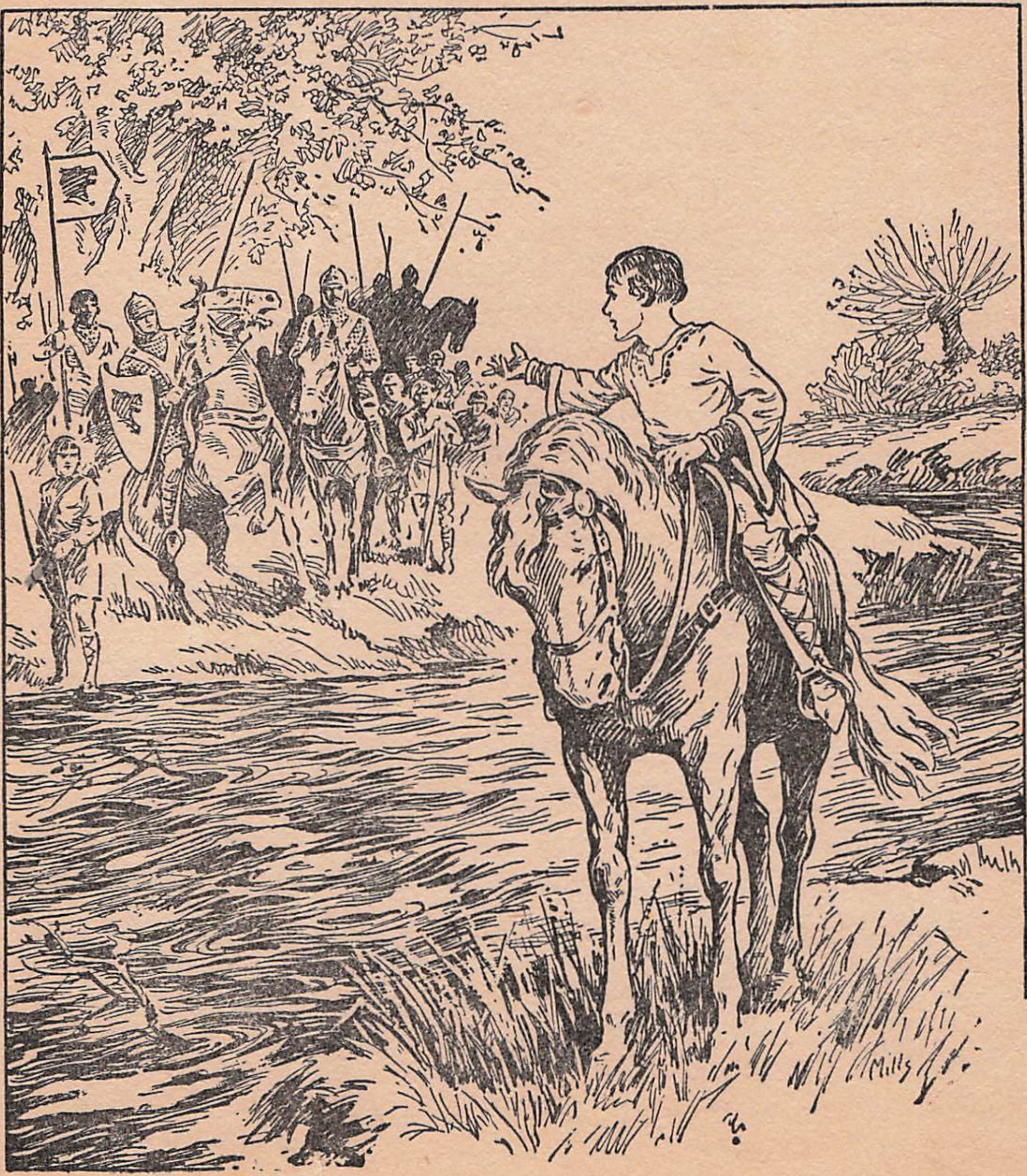
In this crafty manner Ranulf won the whole-hearted support of his tenants, and my uncle was so eager to help him seize Belesme he took with him, not only his men-at-arms, but every man who could bend a bow or use a pike, leaving at Hallowdown none but women and children and old men.

His four sons went with him, and I was eager to go too. But Sir Robert told me, with a kindly squeeze of the shoulder, that I was not fitted for hard fighting.

And this I knew to be true, for though I was nearly seventeen my stature and strength were no more than those of a boy of twelve, and I limped badly, having been crippled by the kick of a horse when I was a child. I had always been sickly, and had never been able to take part in the manly games at which my cousins excelled. The good monks of Hordown had taught me to read and write, but I would gladly have exchanged this monkish lore to have been able to pull a bow like my cousin Henry, or sit a horse like Jehan.

But though I was sore disappointed at being left behind, I kept a brave face, saying to my uncle, as he made ready to depart, " I will hold Hallowdown while you are away."

My uncle had been gone some weeks, and I sat alone in the solar



" I HAVE AN OFFER TO MAKE."

chamber at Hallowdown, reading a manuscript that the Prior of Hordown had lent me, when old Roger, our bailiff, came to me in great distress, wringing his hands and crying that men-at-arms were coming through the woods towards the village. A lad tending swine had brought the news, and now, so said Roger, with many a pious call to the Saints, our people were getting a few chattels together and preparing to flee.

" The boy saith they are led by a knight with a boar and crown on his banner," he added. " It must be that Fulc of Blois hath learned that Sir Robert is away and hath come to burn Hallowdown."

I nodded gravely. Nigh a year ago, we had soundly drubbed Fulc, when he had come with some of his Angevin mercenaries to rob us, and he had fled swearing vengeance. And now it seemed likely that he would keep his word to burn both village and castle when next he came to Hallowdown.

Roger went to the window slit and stood peering out with his near-sighted old eyes, and I limped round and joined him, and looked across the valley to the woods on the other side of the Stour. At first I saw nothing unusual, but presently a glitter of sun on armour flickered among the trees. A little later, where the forest thinned, we saw a party of some twoscore men-at-arms riding along the river bank.

'Twas plain they were seeking for the ford that crossed the Stour just below the village, for ever and anon they would halt and scan the river, which was heavy with the autumn floods, so that 'twas not easy for a stranger to find the ford.

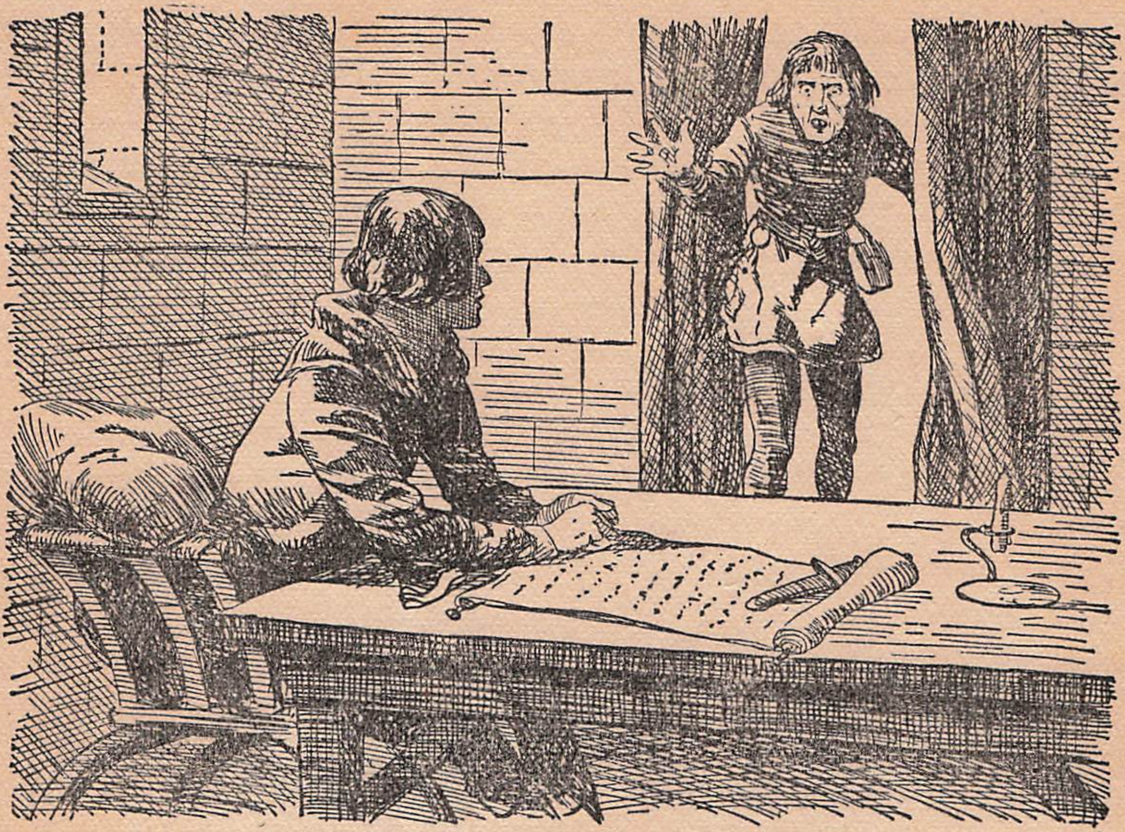
" Saints defend us ! " Roger quavered in his cracked voice, and fell to wringing his skinny hands again. " We must flee or they will murder us. There is naught else to do."

At this I answered him sharply. " We shall do no such thing. I pledged my word to hold Hallowdown for my uncle, and hold it I will."

Roger stared at me as if he thought I were mad, and his lower lip trembled. Then he protested, " But there is not a man can pull a bow against them, master. Else we might try to hold the ford, for 'tis no easy matter crossing with the flood."

" Roger," said I quietly, " if I cannot fight, I will take the advice of Ranulf of Born and use my wits to beat Fulc and his cut-throats."

The bailiff shook his head, and showed plainly that he had little faith that my wits could beat Fulc's lances. But he held his peace, being a



MEN-AT-ARMS WERE COMING THROUGH THE WOODS.

little shamed, it may be, at the cowardice which he had displayed. So we stood in silence, watching Fulc and his ruffians hunting for the ford.

On a sudden a plan came into my head. Had there been time to think much on it I might have thought it too foolhardy to come to success. As it was I cried out excitedly, " Roger, methinks it can be done ! "

Saying which I limped away down the winding stairs to the great hall, and across that into the courtyard. Roger followed behind me, asking me what I meant to do, but I gave him no answer till we were in the stables, and I was saddling Prince, an old war-horse, the only beast my uncle had left behind when he took his men to join Ranulf of Born.

Then I told him what I would do.

" You will be slain," he cried, and sought to dissuade me from my project, but I paid no heed to what he said, and scrambling on to Prince's broad back, rode him down through the village, where our people were scurrying to and fro like ants whose nest has been disturbed, women and children crying and the old men growling curses against the raiders. I cried to them to tarry awhile before they fled into the woods, and then rode on down to the ford.

The river was flowing strongly, with many a big mass of brownish-white scum swirling in circles on its surface.

This it was that hid from sight the smooth, flat stones with which the ford had been paved in my grandfather's time. Fulc and his men were still looking for the ford, and ever and anon one of them would ride a little way into the water, only to discover that it deepened suddenly and threatened to sweep him and his horse away.

When the knaves caught sight of me riding down to the river bank they raised a yell, and several bows were bent in my direction. Sore afraid I was, yet I managed to call out in a calm voice, speaking in Norman-French, " Fulc of Blois, I have a bargain to offer you. Bid your rogues not to shoot."

At this the Angevin—he was a little, swarthy man, with thick, black brows which met above a big hooked nose—bade his men hold hands. Then to me he said, " What have you to say, boy ? "

" I hold Hallowdown for my uncle in his absence," I replied, " and I am not minded that you should burn the village."

Fulc gave me an evil grin.

" By the Splendour ! " he swore, " is that so, my coxcomb ? Hast aught else to say ? "

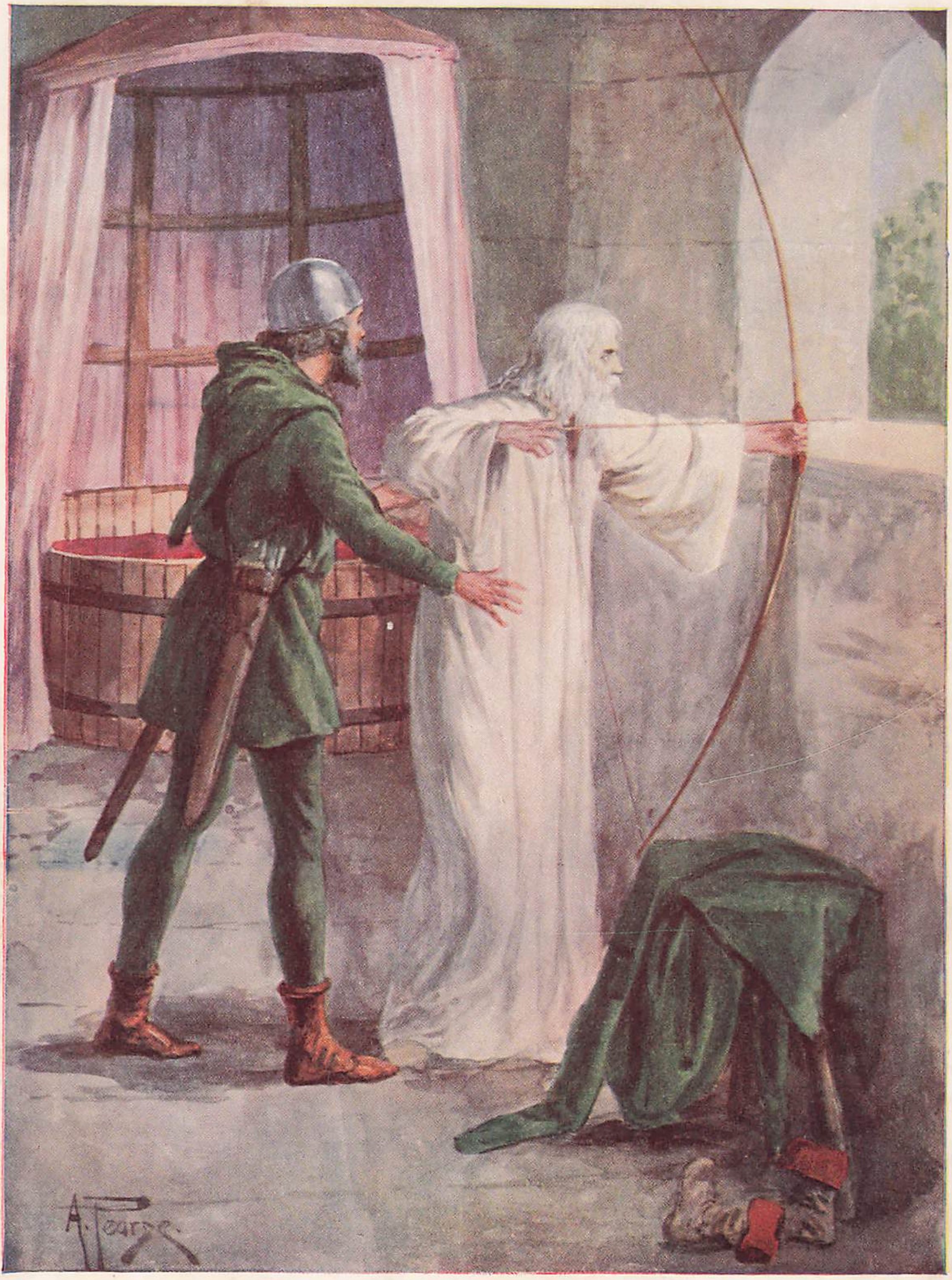
I nodded my head. " Yes," I replied quietly. " You have force enow to beat me, that I know. But 'twill not be easy to find the ford, and when you do 'twill not be easy to cross with the river in flood, and half a dozen bowmen on this side of it, hidden from ye. You will lose a dozen men or more, ere ye win across."

At this there came a wrathful mutter from Fulc's men, and several lifted their bows again. But the Angevin quelled them with a few sharp commands ; then scowled at me and asked, " Why say you this, boy ? "

" I have an offer to make," I replied. " I will show ye the ford and allow ye to cross over unhindered. In return you shall pledge your knightly word not to burn the village or harm the people. But you shall have all the swine and cattle ye need."

At this a man who bestrode a big roan horse beside the Angevin, laughed and roared. " Gramercy, lad, for your generosity. But we can take what we want without any promises."

Fulc, however, spake in a low voice to the man, and then gave me a crafty smile.



THE DEATH OF ROBIN HOOD

Barambo, his enormous father, was squatting peacefully at the foot of a large tree, where he would sleep, reclining like a human being. Despite his placidity, however, he would, throughout the night, be a watchful sentinel over his mate who had built her nest in the branches overhead where she was nursing a two-months-old baby, which had just cut its first teeth, but despite the size to which it would grow so quickly, was as yet not half the size of a human infant of its own age.

Chalangu told his tale of woe to his parents, but the mother was too busy and the father too self-centred for either of them to be willing to accompany their son down to the forest for such a small matter as helping him to revenge himself upon a couple of serpents. In vain, also, he tried to interest his brothers and sisters and their mates in the matter. And so, a few days later, Chalangu again descended the mountain by himself.

By that time, the pythoness had hatched out her eggs and he saw her moving across a clearing accompanied by her young. Directly she caught sight of him she hissed loudly and coiled herself up, whereupon all the young reptiles hid themselves in the twists and folds of her coils.

The gorilla, however, knew that trick. Roaring with rage and beating his chest, he advanced standing upright like a man, with the intention of obliterating the pythoness and her foul brood at one fell sweep.

It is, however, a fact that the gorilla's intelligence is so small that he can think of not more than one thing at a time, and so it happened that Chalangu, mad with the lust for revenge, never heeded the twenty-foot python that came gliding across the ground from the concealment of a thicket behind him.

Just as the hands of Chalangu were about to close on the neck of the pythoness, who kept lashing out at him while she hissed wickedly, the python rose on his coils and sent in a smashing blow which would have broken the gorilla's back had the blunt nose landed fairly upon the spine. But Chalangu, manœuvring for a better position from which to grip the female serpent, stepped aside in the nick of time so that the python's blow fell glancing from his shoulder and only staggered him.

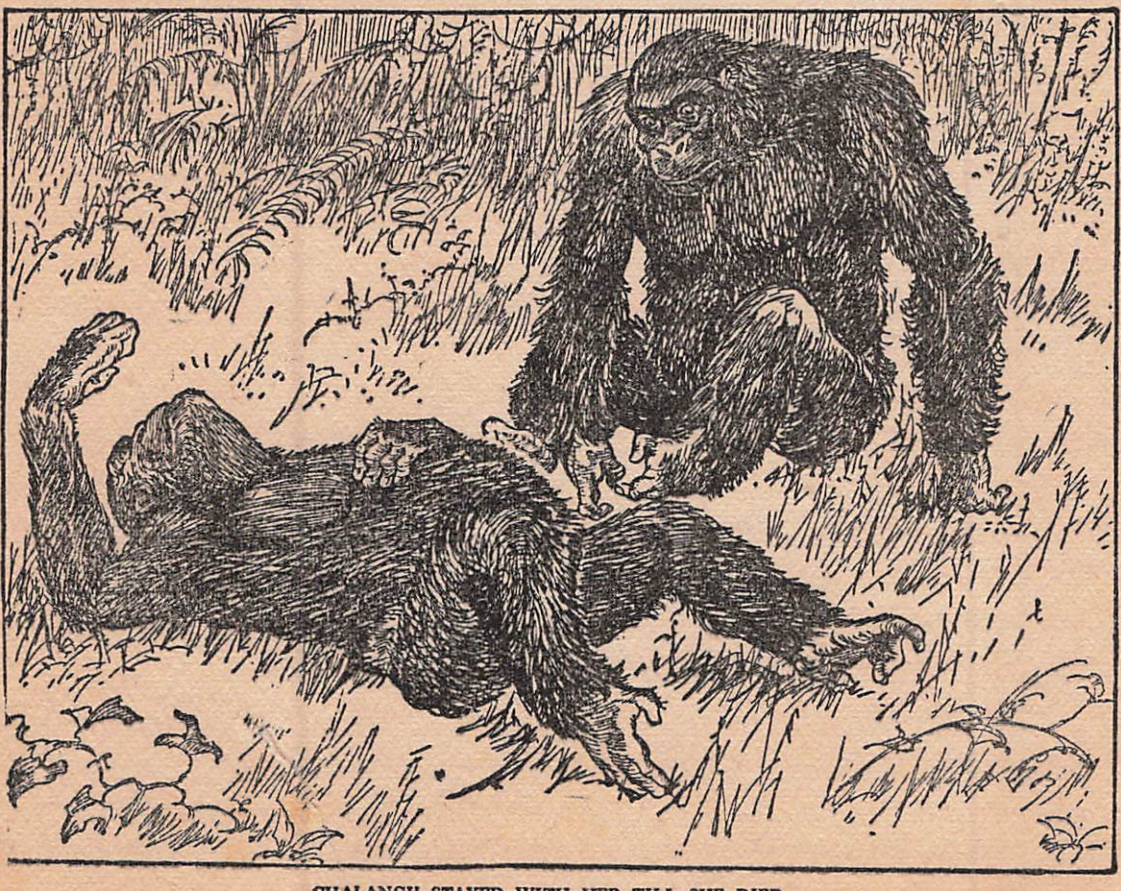
By that time, however, the python had wound his tail around the stump of a fallen tree, and had he once succeeded in getting the rest of his coils around the gorilla, that might well have been the end of Chalangu. For although he could have strangled the python or have torn its head off, there was still the danger of the pythoness, which would have attacked

That, however, was the beginning of a strange feud, for although the gorilla, despite his great strength and savage equipment, is not an offensive animal, he is both taciturn and singularly self-contained, but will fight like a very fury in defence of his mate. It is equally true that the python will defend her eggs or her young when newly hatched against attacks by hungry animals.

The pythoness, keeping her eggs warm, watched every movement made by the big gorilla, while the python aswing from a strong-limbed bough above, also watched silently, waiting his chance to send his coils lashing in a death-grip around Chalangu's body, if he came too close.

The probability is that the gorilla would at once have attacked either serpent separately, but his instinct warned him that he would be taking on too big a job if he attempted to tackle the pair together.

When Matuma was dead, Chalangu climbed up through the Kalamba Forest and rejoined his family.



CHALANGU STAYED WITH HER TILL SHE DIED.

DEEP IN THE FOREST

Neither of the two young Kivu gorillas were to be mistaken for their cousins of the West Coast, for both were exceedingly hairy, Chalangu being black, whereas Matuma showed a touch of red in her colouring; the heads of both were surmounted by a kind of coronet of thickened skin.

Silently, and still moving on all fours, they took their way down the hill-side until they reached the high virgin forest, where the Okapi lives, but where even the primitive Wambatti pigmies seldom penetrate.

That forest was a starvation place for any large animal which was not a climber and did not live on leaves, for there was little to get on the ground, because all low-growing vegetation was either stifled by the crowns of the great trees shutting out all light and air, or was crushed by the litter of fallen branches which encumbered the ground.

It was a place of silence and something less than half-lights.

The two gorillas moved steadily through the Kalamba Forest, until they came to the first patch of human cultivation far down the hill-side.

There they fed grossly upon succulent roots which the natives had planted. The natives themselves watched fearfully from a distance, but when the brutes departed, lacked the courage to follow the imprints of feet which were three times the size of those of a full-grown man.

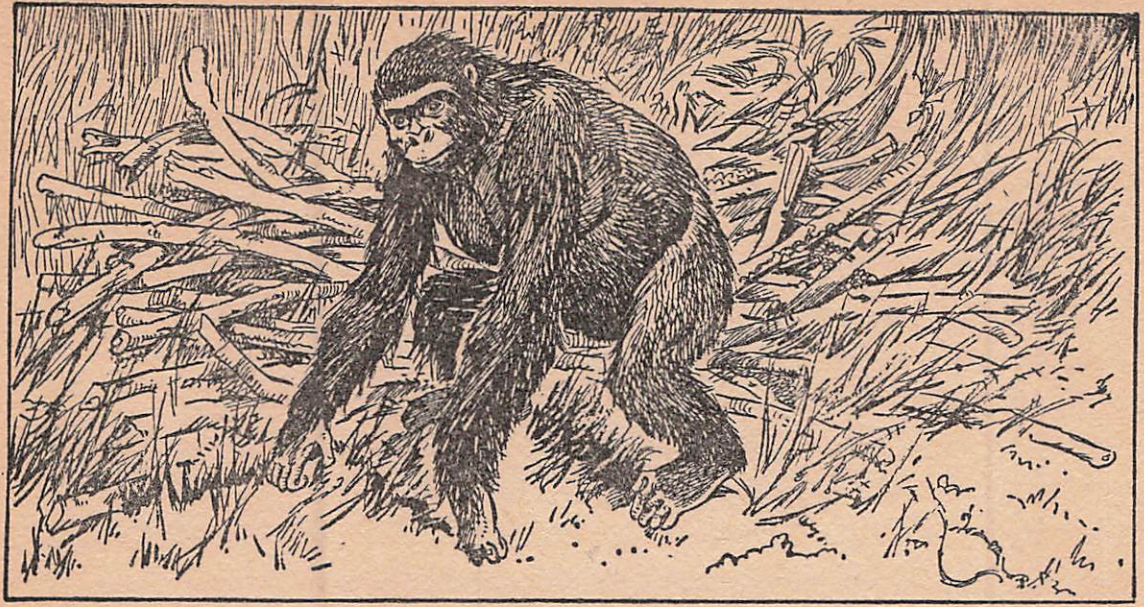
Other people who were less fearful, however, watched the gorillas by the aid of binoculars in a state of intense excitement, for Jim Snow and his partners had made an expedition to the Kivu district for the special purpose of filming the greater anthropoid apes.

That night Matuma and Chalangu slept in a hut, as their kind will do whenever they can find a deserted human habitation.

Next morning Chalangu roused the forest as he beat upon his mighty bosom with a steady thump, thump, thump of sheer bravado.

Then they continued their homeward journey.

It was Matuma who first saw the large clutch of dull white, oblong, leathery-skinned eggs which a python had stacked at the foot of a tree. Before Chalangu could stop her, she swung forward, picked an egg off the pile and bit through it to find a half-hatched snake inside. Then, even as Chalangu opened his mouth to roar a warning, a hard flat head shot out of the undergrowth, and dealing the female gorilla a terrible blow, smashed in her breast-bone. Chalangu stayed with her until she died, but paid no attention to the female python, which had now settled her coils around the clutch of eggs to hatch them out.



DEEP IN THE FOREST

CHALANGU turned round in the nest of broken branches he had made overnight, rubbed his sooty face, then rose, stretching and yawning and showing the dagger-like canine teeth with which his powerful jaws were equipped.

The ten members of the family to which he belonged were sleeping in other nests, either upon the ground close at hand or in the branches of the trees overhead.

He left his nest without disturbing the others and began feeding on young bamboo shoots. After a while, however, this young Hercules among primates moved off, walking on all-fours with a curious swinging movement and using his arms as crutches to bring his six foot, twenty-three-stone body forward with a kind of jump, and passed through the cold, bleak bamboo jungle which clothed the ravines and sides of a mountain, best part of eight thousand feet high.

For a while, Chalungu stood looking down upon the trees of the great Kalamba Forest stretching away for mile upon mile beneath him like a vast green carpet.

Then he returned and awakened Matuma, the female gorilla who had taken his wayward fancy.

For a time they chattered softly, taking good care not to awaken Barambo, the grey-haired old male, whose carcass weighed over thirty-two stone, which it would have taken ten strong natives to lift, and who ruled his family with a rod of iron.

riding hard for the shelter of the mud fort. If he reached that sanctuary there would be an end to the rebels' plans. Faiz Ullah noosed a rope and waited. Nearer and nearer drew the sharp tattoo of racing hooves. It seemed impossible that the rider could round the bend, beneath the overhanging rock where the Afghans waited, at that mad pace ; but as the chestnut horse flashed by beneath Faiz Ullah dropped his rope and, his companions hanging on as well, Hart was swung upwards, while his mount vanished into the abyss with a terrible scream of equine fear.

" We will wait where we are until the darkness of night descends," decided Faiz Ullah, when they had bound Danny Hart securely. " Then we will take the infidel to our village to be sport for the women until he dies."

Danny, listening, shuddered, for he knew not a little of the untender mercy shown by Afghan women when a captive is handed over to them.

Meanwhile, the officer in command at the mud fort was growing uneasy at the non-arrival of the intelligence officer, of which he had been warned by heliograph, and, towards sunset, moved his men out along the road that led to the plains. Before they had marched very far they encountered a weary Afghan stumbling up the path, and Yakub Khan gasped out the story of what he had seen. Whereupon Captain Swan posted his men with exceeding care and, when darkness came, Faiz Ullah and his henchmen, pricking their prisoner along with the points of their knives, walked unsuspectingly into the ambush which had been prepared for them, and were disarmed and made prisoner without a blow being struck or a shot fired.

Danny Hart stretched out his hand to thank Yakub Khan for his rescue after they had eaten at the fort and the story had been told.

" What can I give you in reward for your services, Yakub Khan ? " he queried.

" Major *sahib*, I have yet to name the price of the chestnut horse," the Afghan answered with a sly smile.

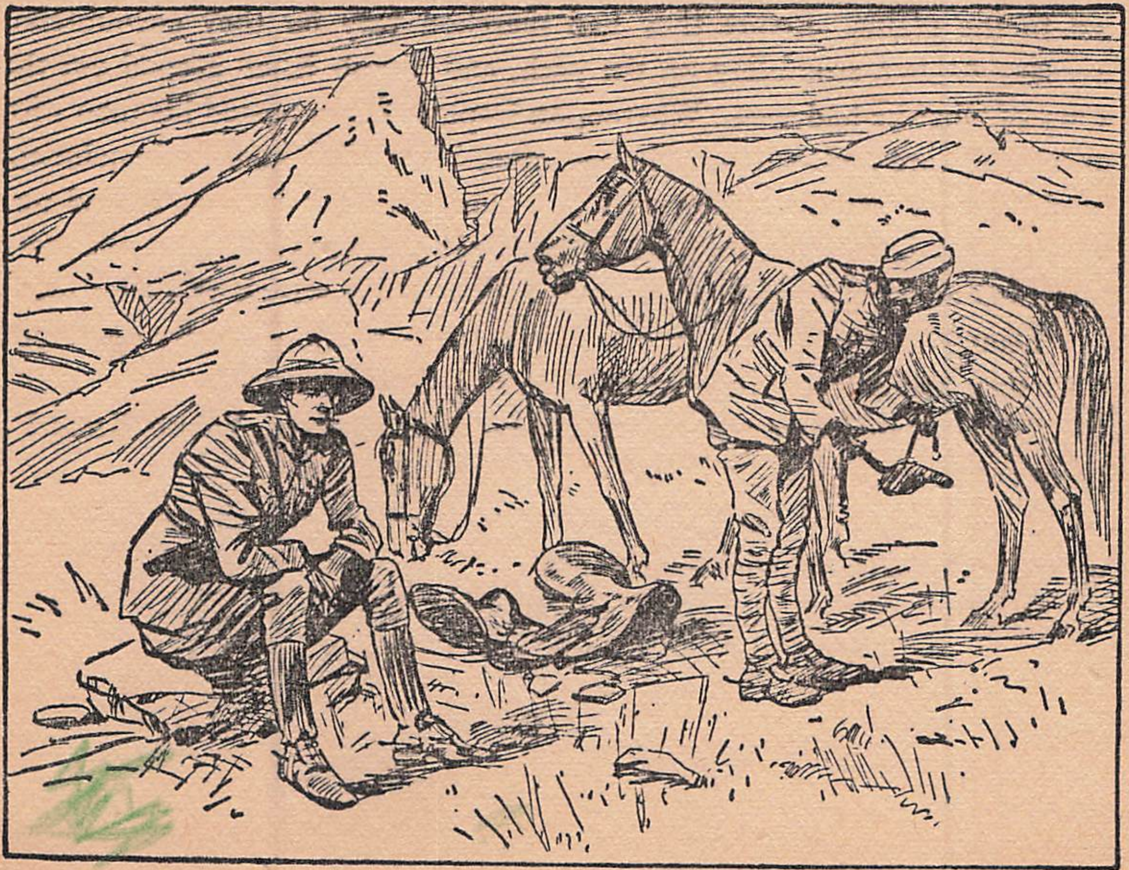
into the horse's back, causing it to rear and plunge madly. Then, before he could regain his balance the chestnut got the bit between its teeth and bolted down the narrow track, with the sheer face of the mountain on the right and a sheer drop into the Yassin Gorge on the left, and only a four-foot wide shelf of rock for roadway between the two.

A moment later a shot rang out and Faiz Ullah, waiting in his eyrie with his lieutenants, laughed.

" Yussuf Ali has shot the *Feringhee*," he exulted.

But it was Yussuf Ali, himself, who took his death from that bullet, which was fired from the rifle of Yakub Khan, who had been watching from across the valley with a pair of binoculars which Hart *sahib* had given him. Now the loyal Afghan was hastening down the mountain-side at a speed none but a man of his race could have used with safety.

Meanwhile Faiz Ullah, waiting a good deal nearer than the boy had led Hart to believe, heard the thunder of approaching hooves and cursed his kinsman for missing his mark. The *Feringhee*, he thought, must be



THERE WAS MURDER IN HIS BLACK HEART.

"Well, four men are not going to hurt you, when I and Yussuf Ali are between you and them, so go your way in peace down from the hills."

"How far off are these men ?" he added, a moment later.

The boy indicated a bend in the hills that was perhaps five miles distant as the crow flies, and Hart set him down. He appeared to have lost interest in the lad, but, was, really, watching him keenly, and so saw him toss a sweetmeat to Yussuf Ali, which the man at once popped into his mouth.

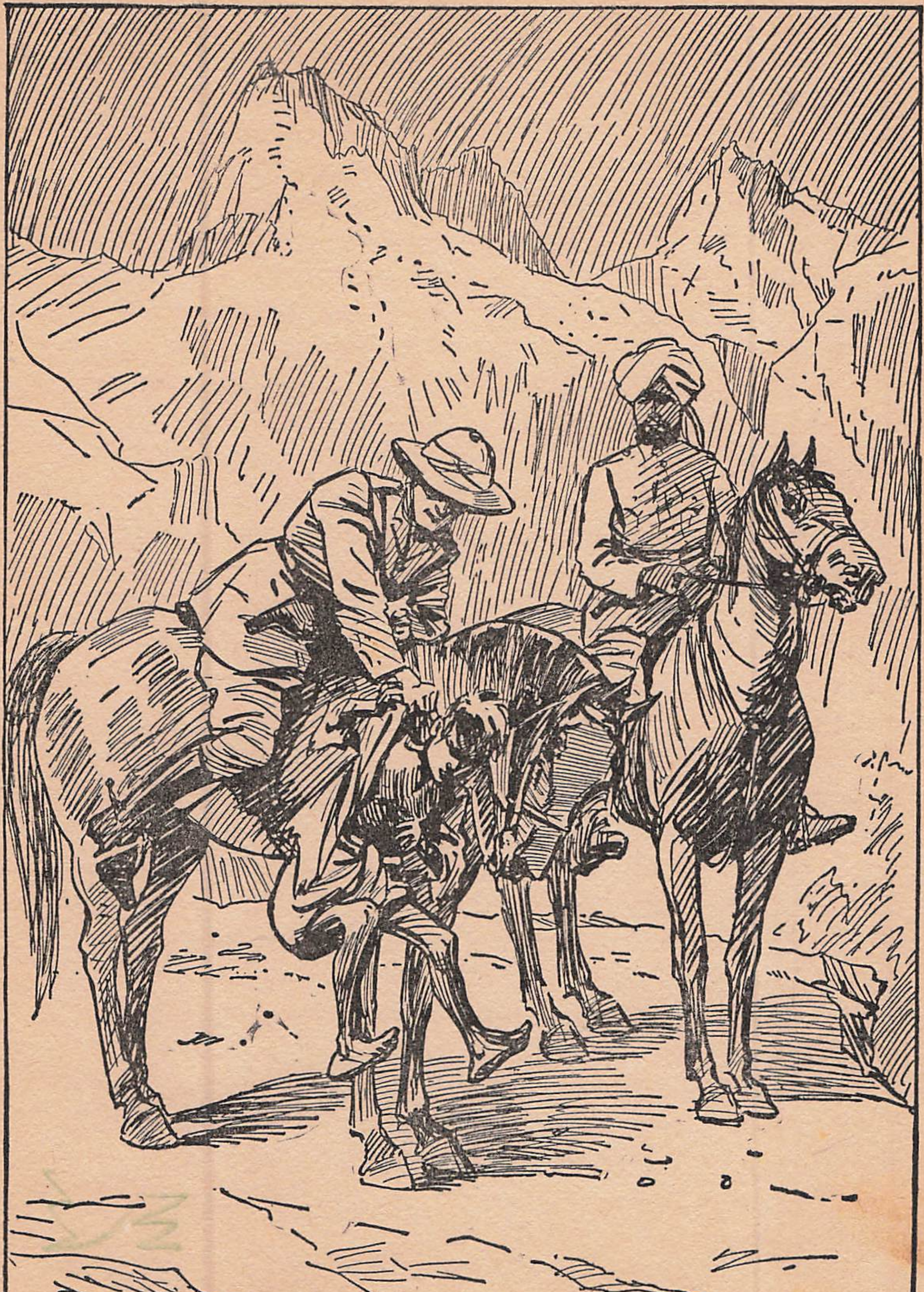
After they had ridden less than another half-mile Hart gave the order to off-saddle for an hour, for they had been riding since just after dawn. When Yussuf Ali, finding a plausible pretext, had stolen away to read the message that was hidden in the sweetmeat, which had long since dissolved in his mouth, leaving a little wad of paper tucked under his tongue, Hart picked up the belt which his servant had laid down and carefully unloaded the revolver which he had permitted the man to carry. He did not altogether distrust his servant ; but, at the same time, he was running no unnecessary risks, for those who play the Great Game cannot afford to take chances.

Yussuf Ali, returning a few moments later, saw that the position of his belt had been slightly changed, and so had a very shrewd idea of what had happened. That put him on his guard, for if the *sahib* was the least bit suspicious of his servant's good faith, Yussuf felt that it was going to be exceedingly difficult to carry out Faiz Ullah's orders, which were to slay the *Feringhee* and join the rebels.

The man resumed his belt, and not by the flicker of an eyelid did his expression betray what was passing in his mind. There was black murder in his heart, but not until the very moment that his master gave the order to re-saddle the horses did he hit upon a plan for the fulfilment of his evil purpose. Then, for a brief instant, an evil smile just moved his bearded lips.

As he saddled Major Hart's chestnut horse Yussuf took care to cover his actions with the shield of his body. As he raised the saddle he contrived to wet his finger, which he ran against the lay of the hair along the horse's backbone, before he lowered the saddle into position and girthed it tight.

The Major, unsuspicious of the trick his *sais* was playing on him, mounted without a qualm, but the next moment he was almost unseated, for his weight, bearing down upon the saddle, drove the upstanding hairs



A GRIP LIKE A VICE CLOSED UPON HIS COLLAR.

the silent swiftness of a fleeting shadow. A moment later Major Hart walked out on to the verandah and signalled to the *sais* that he was ready to start.

The road to the hills was very quiet, and neither master nor man spoke, for each was busy with his own thoughts. Hart, pale and worn from the fever which had been the immediate cause of his being transferred from regimental duty on the plains to intelligence service in the hills, was thinking what a feather in his cap it would be if he could, with the help of only a few sepoys from the garrison of the little mud fort, capture the redoubtable rebel, Faiz Ullah, and his chief lieutenants, who, according to Yakub Khan's report, were coming in to tell their leader what success had attended their various missions to stir up discontent and rebellion against the British Raj right along the frontier.

Yussuf, for his part, was watching keenly for any signal whereby his kinsman might make known, in secret, his present whereabouts. For Yussuf Ali had completely reverted to type. A hillman, born and bred, he had been content to serve his master and the British Raj with exemplary faith, so long as he was far away in the plains, where he saw but few of his fellow-tribesmen ; but the return to the hills had brought about a very different state of mind. Now he was all on fire to join the rebels, and only the knowledge that he might serve the Cause better by remaining with his present master than by hurrying off to join the malcontents, had sufficed to keep him in his present service so long.

It was getting on towards mid-morning when a small boy came screaming down the pathway as fast as his feet could carry him. Danny turned his horse sideways to prevent the fugitive getting by.

The lad made a feint, as though he intended diving through beneath the horse's belly, but a hand with a grip like a vice closed upon the collar of his ragged garments, and next instant he was half sitting, half lying across the saddle bow and staring fearfully up into Major Danny Hart's brown eyes.

" Well, *chokra*, what's the trouble ? " smiled Danny.

" Protector of the poor, there are bad men in the hills, they have beaten me," the boy whined.

" What kind of men ? "

" Very fierce men and well armed, *sahib*."

" How many ? "

" Four, *sahib*."

the horses ; food and water for two days will be required, and my revolver is to be thoroughly cleaned and oiled."

" *Accha, sahib*," came the obedient answer, and Yussuf Ali salaamed his way out of the room ; but his shrewd eyes had taken note of the new bridle which lay upon the table. He had also seen the meeting between his master and Yakub Khan out on the *maidan*, and had a pretty good notion that a secret service message had passed from one to the other. He had served Hart *sahib* for a number of years, it is true ; but, after all, he was brother-in-blood to Faiz Ullah, the rebel, and who shall say that blood is not thicker than water ?

What Yussuf did not know was that his master's faithful orderly came creeping to the window that night, long after the last light in the bungalow had been extinguished, and after listening to his orders and repeating them in a whisper, stole soft-footed away to where the nearest *risala* was stationed. In consequence of the message carried by the orderly to the officer commanding the cavalry, two *sawars* rode steadily south through the night, carrying tidings to Peshawar of the rising that was being planned by Faiz Ullah of the Beni-Kail.

At dawn, when Yussuf Ali was busy saddling the new horse his master had purchased and also a mount for himself, the helios were winking towards the hills, conveying the tidings Hart had learned to the garrison of a diminutive mud fort, at which he proposed picking up a small force with which to arrest Faiz Ullah and his conspirators on the road that overhangs the Yassin Gorge.

At the same time a small boy crept into the compound and squatted himself down beside the well, where he waited patiently until Yussuf Ali came to draw water.

" Listen, child," said the *sais*, whispering scarcely above the sound of a love-sick maiden's sighing, " yesterday my *sahib* and Yakub Khan talked together on the *maidan*. I heard naught of what was said, for they kept well away from any cover, right out in the open. My *sahib*, however, brought home a new horse, with new saddle and bridle. The bridle and bit he took with him to his own room, then bade me prepare to ride to the hills with him this morning. Go swiftly, child, and tell these tidings to Faiz Ullah. If anything is moving in the hills to-day he must find a means of letting me know."

" I hear and I obey, my uncle," the boy answered, and was gone with attention, bent the horse in and out among the small bushes at mad speed, besides showing him off in a dozen other clever tricks of the polo game. The officer raised a beckoning finger, and the horse-dealer swung towards him at a hand canter.

" The horse is for sale ? " the officer queried.

" All things are for sale, major-sahib, if the purchaser's purse be deep enough," the dealer answered boldly.

" And the price ? "

" Will not the *sahib* try the horse for himself before that question need be answered."

" Certainly, if that be your wish, Yakub Kahn. Just lengthen the stirrups for me, and I will try him out across the *maidan*."

" Nay, major-sahib, take him to thine own compound. The reckoning can stand until we meet again. The saddle and bridle I give thee for goodwill ; but take care of the bit, *sahib*, for there are not many like it."

Thus saying, the Afghan made a quick salaam and, turning on his heel, strode swiftly away. Major Hart mounted the horse and rode thoughtfully back to his quarters at a leisurely pace. His new acquisition seemed a docile, well-mannered beast. But it was not of the horse he was thinking. When he reached cantonments and his *sais* came forward to hold his stirrup and take his mount, Hart followed the man into the stable and took away with him the bridle and bit which had been a present from Yakub Khan.

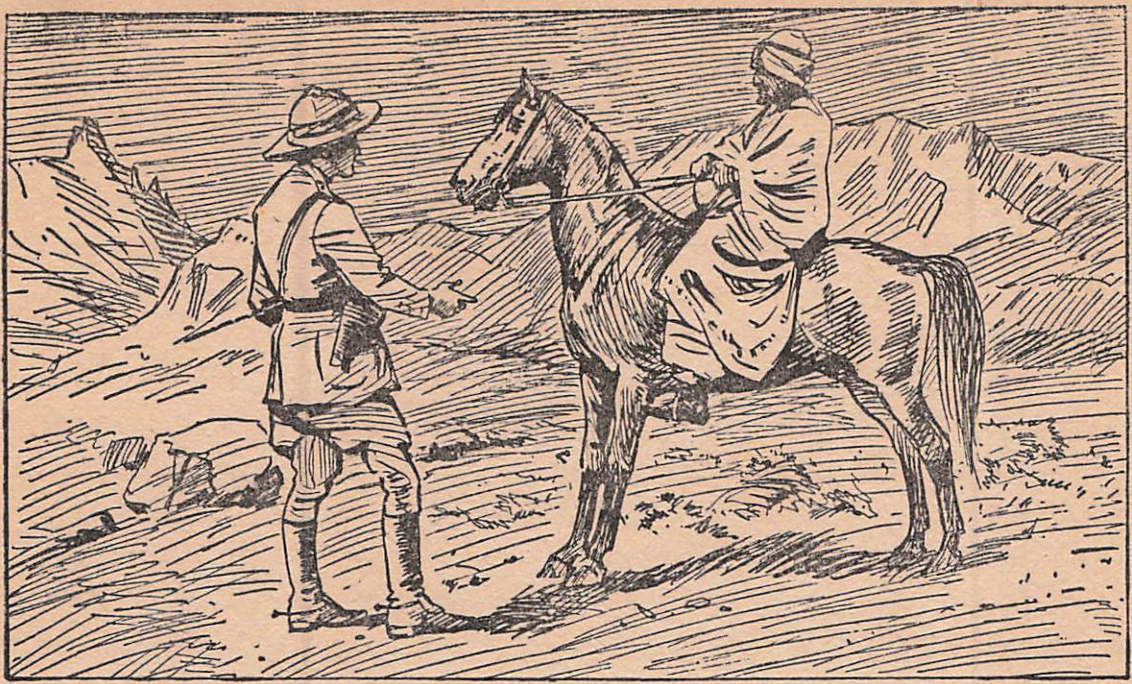
At first sight there did not seem to be anything unusual about the harness, but Hart's sensitive fingers searching the steel of the bit presently encountered a slight protrusion, upon which he pressed, and an instant later a small wad of paper lay in his hand. On it was written, " They meet to-morrow on the road overlooking the Yassin Gorge ; go by the eastern route and may Allah deliver them into thy hand."

" Um," said Danny, as he lit his pipe, " I think Faiz Ullah did a bad day's work when he settled a blood feud by butchering Yakub Khan's maternal cousin. Truly, all things are for sale, if the purse of the purchaser be deep enough."

A knock fell upon the door, and the *sais*, Yussuf Ali, entered, bowing obsequiously.

" What orders, *sahib ?* " he questioned.

" We ride at dawn for the hills," his master answered, " see thou to



AMBUSHED

A HOT wind blew across the bare *maidan*, here and there a dust-devil got up to whirl madly away, picking up scraps of paper and even engulfing an unwary kite-hawk or two in the vortex. Danny Hart stood staring away to where the sun of evening was reddening the white purity of the mountain-tops, that stood guard over the Indian country behind the North-West Frontier.

From time to time he tapped his well-polished brown riding-boot impatiently with the little whip he carried, from time to time cast an angry glance at his wrist-watch. But the East hurries for no man, and there are times when even a *sahib* must learn to possess his soul in patience.

And then from the depths of a nullah that bordered the *maidan*, the folds of a turban appeared, followed next instant by keen features, which showed two piercing eyes set either side of a hawk-beaked, predatory nose, and a thin slit of a mouth half hidden in a big beard dyed scarlet with lime. Yakub Khan rode out on to the plain, mounted on a chestnut waler that was all fire and breeding and looked as if it could gallop for ever.

Major Hart cocked a knowing eye, for he was by way of being a judge of horseflesh, and the Afghan, seeing that he had attracted the *sahib's* among the tall reeds. Happily for me Fulc's men could not come in pursuit of me till they had dragged their leader on to solid ground, and by the time that was done I was out of sight.

For some time I heard them running after me, shouting threats and curses, but none ever caught sight of me in the maze of paths, and to judge by their yells they were soon getting off the path and in too much danger of being stifled in the ooze to concern themselves further about me.

As for me, I ran on to Hallowdown, knowing that Fulc and his ruffians would not find their way out of the fens for many hours—if they ever came out at all. Then telling the villagers what I had done, and that they need have no fear of Fulc for some time to come, I mounted Prince again and set out to find my uncle at Born to warn him of the danger that threatened Hallowdown.

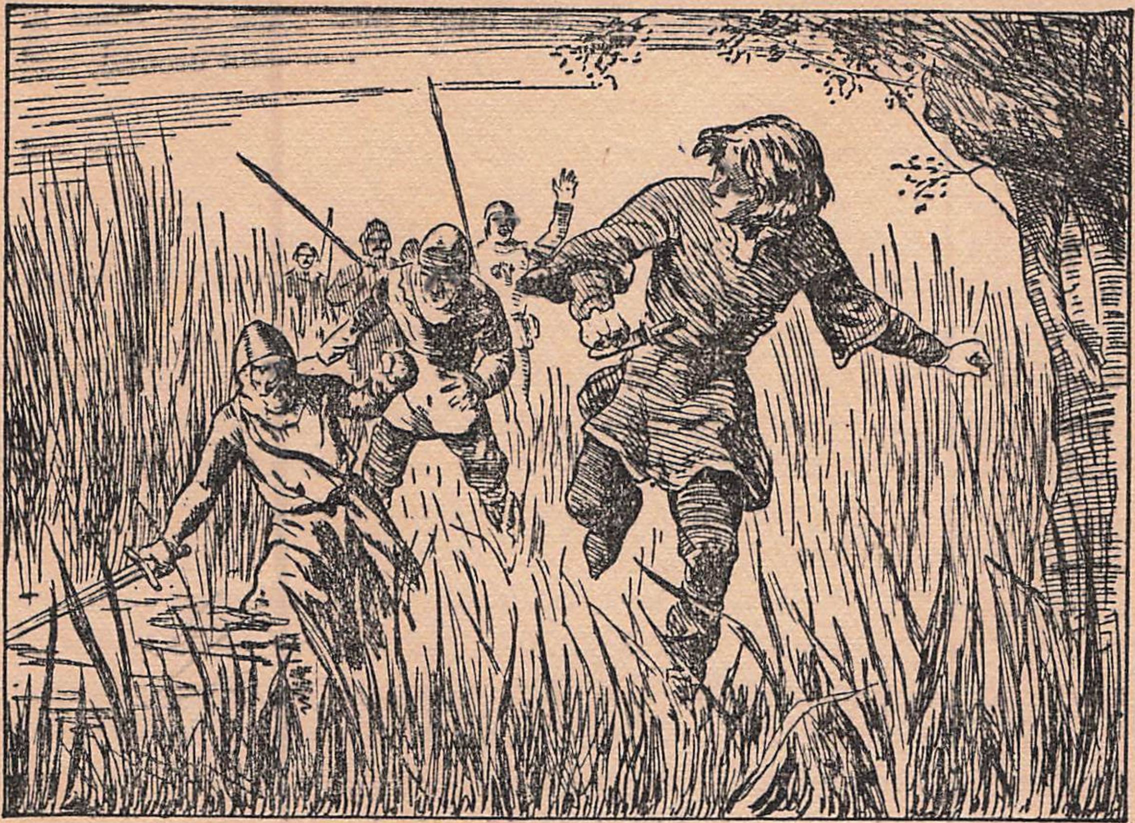
I had not gone far when I met a troop of horse, with my uncle and another little man riding at their head. As I told my uncle what had taken place, this little man sat motionless on his great war-horse, watching my face with bright beady eyes, till he wellnigh confused me with his steady stare.

And when I was finished he slapped his thigh, exclaiming : " By the Sepulchre ! what have I oft told thee, Robert ? A little wit is better than hard fighting. The boy hath made his cunning do the work of twoscore men-at-arms. Mortdieu ! he should go far."

And he chuckled and nodded his head at me a great many times, whilst I looked at him with some awe knowing now that he must be Ranulf of Born.

There is little more to tell. Ranulf and my uncle had been on their way to make an attack on one of the castles belonging to Thomas of Belesme, and had with them several hundred men-at-arms. Threescore of these were left at Hallowdown under my command, Ranulf insisting that spite my youth I was fit to command an even bigger force. When at last Fulc and his men straggled out of the fens, half starved and too weary to fight or flee, I was at hand to take them all prisoners.

Later Ranulf of Born took me into his service, and, having conceived a liking for me, pressed my fortunes with the Empress, so that in the end Prince Henry, her son, took me into his household. When he became king I stood high in his favour, and was rewarded for my services with a grant of three manors, any one of which was worth two of Hallowdown.



FLED AS HARD AS MY CRIPPLED LEG WOULD ALLOW.

So I set off into the marshes, and led the rascals by twisting narrow paths deeper and deeper into the fens, till I felt certain they were lost, and could not find their way out again without a guide.

Ever and anon one of them would take a false step and have to be dragged out of the quagmire by his companions, and in most places the path was so narrow not more than one man could walk along it at a time. Soon they were so ill-tempered by reason of the mishaps they suffered, they gave less attention to me, and stumbled on cursing and crying that they would be heartily glad to get back to solid ground.

But Fulc, who was immediately behind me, or beside me where the path was wide enow, kept alert, and several times demanded to know how much farther 'twas to Hallowdown. I made excuse there was no straight path through the marshes, and bided my chance to escape.

It came sooner than I expected, at a place where the path wellnigh vanished. Here the Angevin stumbled off the path and went up to his knees in the bog. Instantly I profited by his mishap, and fled as hard as my crippled leg would allow, twisting and turning along narrow paths the edge of the marshes, when I dismounted, and called across, " I must go afoot through the marsh, but I will meet ye opposite the ford. 'Tis marked on your side by a line of seven willow trees."

At this methinks he grew suspicious once more, but in the end (thinking, perchance, 'twas not likely a stripling such as I would seek to trick him) he rode on with his men. I took a winding treacherous path through the fens, where, for all that I was acquainted with the place, I came perilously near to being bogged on several occasions, for the quagmire was treacherous and for ever shifting, so that what was solid land to-day might be morass to-morrow. Also in many places the paths were knee-deep in mire, and wellnigh impossible to be distinguished from the bog. In many places six- and seven-foot reeds grew thickly, adding to the difficulty of finding a way through the marsh, so that, once lost there, a man might wander hopelessly in circles till either he dropped from exhaustion or he made a false step and was swallowed by the quagmire.

When I came in sight of the seven willow trees on the north bank Fulc and his rascals were already there, uttering angrily among themselves and casting suspicious glances across the river at the reeds, where bowmen might easily have lurked.

" Cross and I will guide ye through the marshes to Hallowdown," I shouted. " Ye must come afoot, for 'tis not possible to cross the fens a-horseback."

At this the rogues grew suspicious again, and debated angrily whether they should cross here, or go back and seek the lower ford. But in the end, the Angevin, who was an impetuous man, leapt from the saddle and, bidding half a dozen of his men stay with the horses, he called to his following, plunged into the river and waded across. So soon as he reached my side, he seized me by the wrist.

" Now, my popinjay," he said in a menacing voice, " sobeit you are thinking of treachery," he glanced uneasily around at the tall sedges, " think again, for at the first hint of trickery you die."

And with that he drew his sword.

I shrugged my shoulders and spoke carelessly, though in truth my heart was in my mouth.

" I shall attempt no trickery," I said.

" Art wise," he told me grimly, then bade me lead the way to Hallowdown.

"I pledge my word," he said mildly, "that if you show us the ford and give us the kine and the swine we want, you and yours shall suffer no harm."

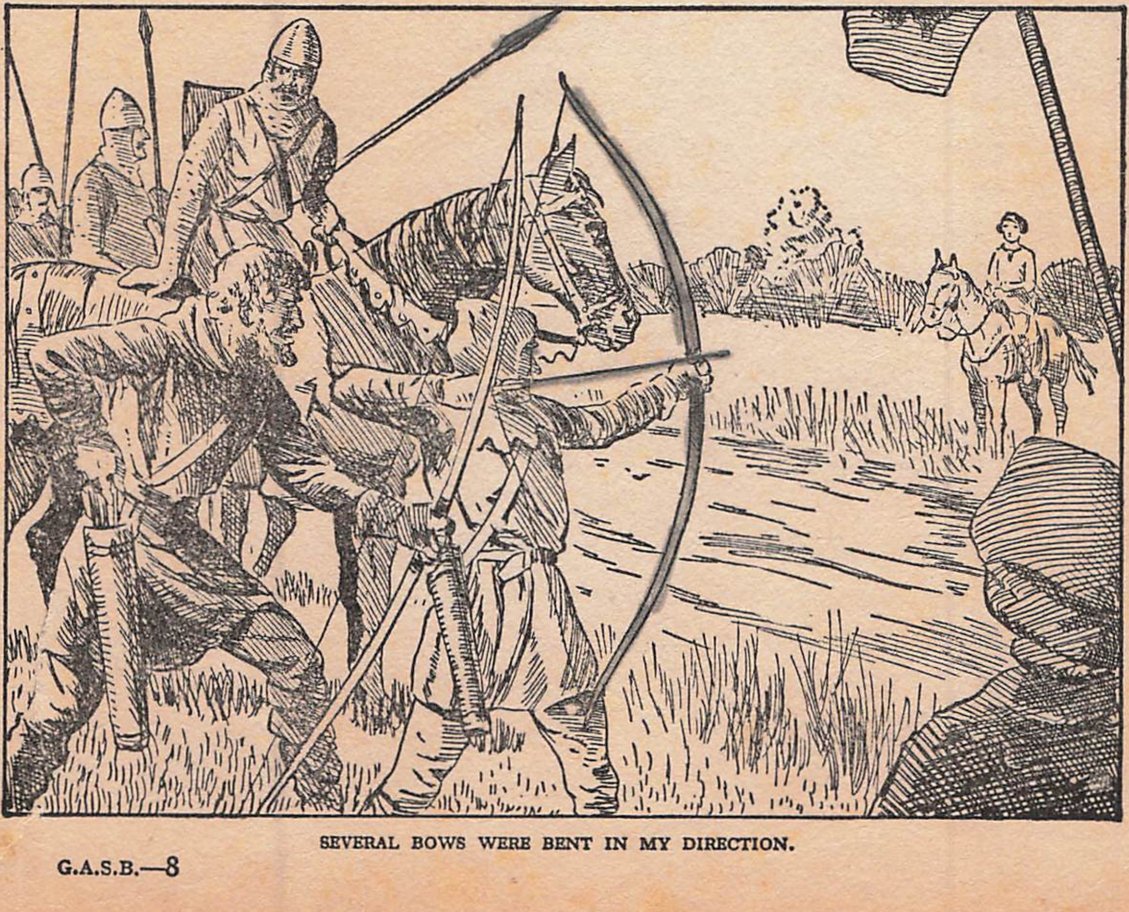
At that I could have cried aloud with relief, for 'twas plain to me the villain had fallen into my trap. He thought to cross the river unopposed, and thereafter work his will upon us. (I knew the knave well enough for that.) But 'twas my plan to persuade him to cross the Stour above the paved ford, where marshes bordered its banks. There I hoped to lose him and his men, for there were only a few paths across the fens, and those not over-plain to strangers.

"I trust your word," I called back. "Ride ye half a mile up the river and I will show ye the ford."

"But there is one here," he answered suspiciously.

"Nay," I replied. "With the river in flood, that ford is impassable. We are forced to go higher up."

I said this with such a guileless countenance he suspected no trickery but called a gruff order, and he and his troop moved off along the north bank of the Stour. I kept pace with them on the south bank till I reached



SEVERAL BOWS WERE BENT IN MY DIRECTION.

"Congratulate me, Archie," he said solemnly, "for this day marks the very apex of my scientific career. Through the winter months we will guard this incredible find, turn and turn about, and in the Spring when the relief expedition arrives, we will transport that mammoth, preserved just as it is in the ice, back to civilisation."

Archie would indeed have congratulated his father, but, before he could speak, a vast rumbling seemed to shake the whole mountain. Then, while the startled party stood listening with fear-widened eyes, the three men, bearing the sleeping bags and the blubber stove, came tearing down the tunnel.

"Lord," they gasped, pawing at the professor, "snow, ice and rocks are rushing down the mountain, the exit from the tunnel is blocked and we are buried alive!"

"Nonsense," expostulated Ephraim Brinton, "we must dig ourselves out."

The briefest examination, however, proved quickly that little short of blasting operations would serve to release them from their ghastly prison.

With fear, that each one of them was too brave to voice, lurking in their eyes, the party sat down to count their stores. On the very shortest commons they had enough food to last them four days, and yet, with starvation staring them in the face Archie thanked the inspiration that had caused him to send for the sleeping bags and the blubber stove.

A week went by and it says much for their fortitude that they did not go mad in those dreadful seven days which brought them to the most desperate straits of hunger. That night the professor, from his sleeping bag, stretched out his hand to his son, "I am sorry, Archie," he murmured, "but as that mammoth is so we soon shall be; death will be painless and thousands of years hence we may be found, just as we are now."

Slowly the boy sat up as he took in the import of his father's words.

"As that mammoth is," he whispered, "good Lord, you've said it! Why, Father, there's food enough in that ice-pack to keep the lot of us clean through the winter until rescue arrives."

"What, eat the mammoth? Never!"

"Well, you please yourself, but the rest of us will."

And when the relief party arrived in the Spring not one scrap of the wonderful find was left. Old Ayut's prophecy had been fulfilled.

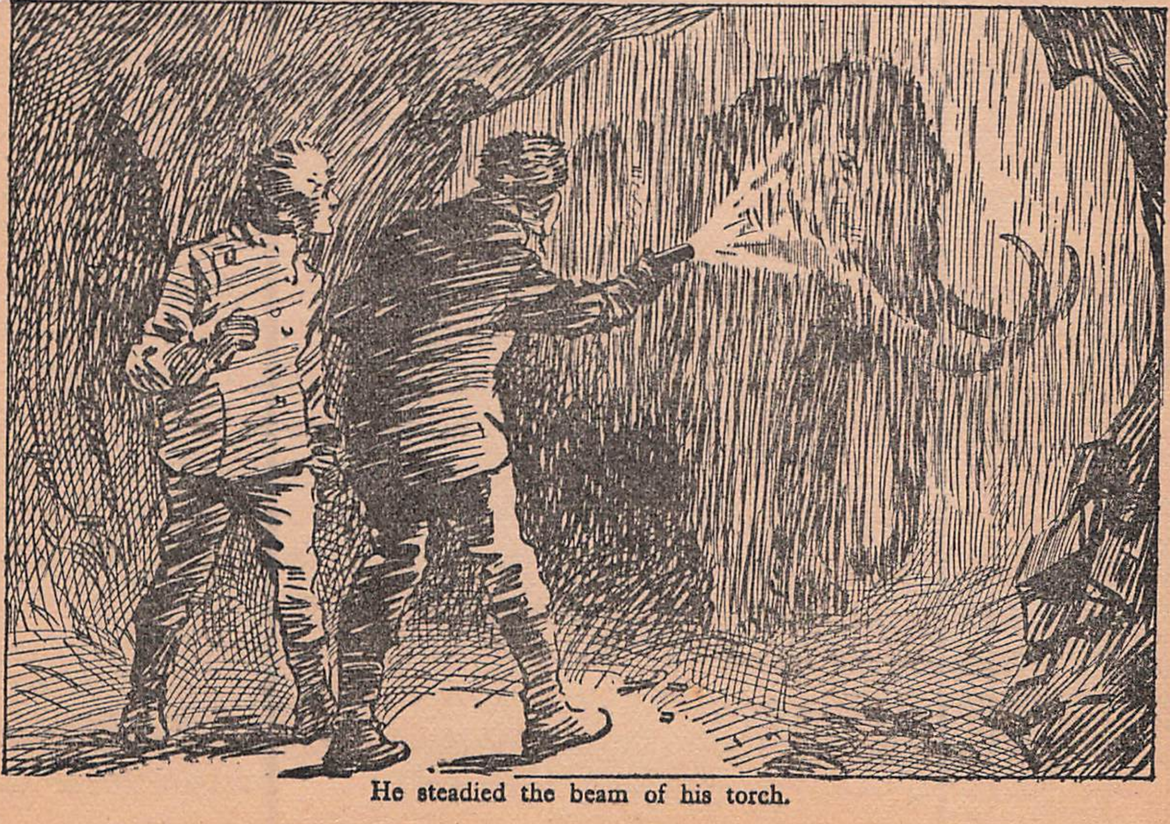
uncanny silence of that underground abode. Instantly the boy took a grip of his nerves and increased his pace.

Rounding the bend in the tunnel, he discovered his father capering madly and almost demented by excitement.

"Eureka! We've got it! We've got it!" shrieked the savant, and then, as he steadied the beam of his torch for an instant, Archie envisaged the cause of his father's abnormal excitement.

That tunnel terminated in a wall of green but absolutely clear ice, and in the midst of that enormous natural refrigerator was embedded the body of a huge mammoth. The creature, which had died thousands upon thousands of years ago, might well have been alive, so perfectly natural was the posture in which the ice held it erect. The eyes seemed to move, as the rays of the torch flashed across them, so the trick of refracted light created the illusion that it was breathing gently, and, momentarily, the shaggy coat seemed to stir, as though some wandering breeze was ruffling the long hairs. The great, curved tusks glowed golden-yellow.

Professor Brinton, with tears in his eyes, turned and gripped his son by the hand.



He steadied the beam of his torch.

bags and the blubber stove. They had spent a perfectly beastly night, nearly frozen to death without their accustomed covering, and, knowing his father's eccentricities, the boy did not intend to risk a second night of such intolerable discomfort. Apart from any considerations of his own well-being, moreover, he did not consider that it was wise for a man of the professor's age to face unnecessary hardships, which could well be avoided by the use of a small amount of forethought.

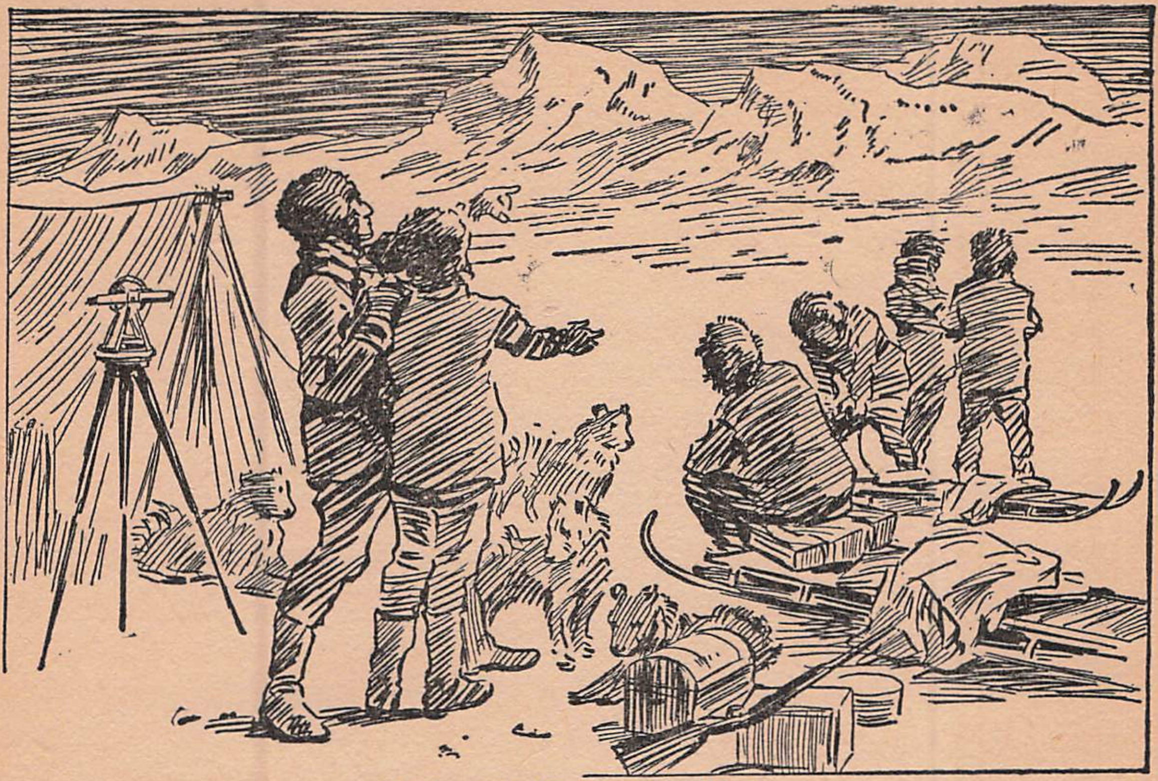
For the next two hours the explorers climbed laboriously up the mountain, until they came to a deep ledge, which extended for a considerable distance along the face of the cliff. Along this shelf Professor Brinton led the way to the opening of a chasm, which he had spied from the frozen plain far beneath their present perch. The vast width of the opening, however, receded into the rock face no more than a few feet, before narrowing sharply to the entry to a tunnel which was twenty or thirty feet high, but no more than ten feet in width.

Without any hesitation the professor plunged into the orifice, followed as heedlessly by the Esquimaux. Archie, however, mindful of the three men he had sent back to fetch the sleeping bags, lingered behind for a moment to stick a small Union Jack in a crevice of the rocks. This he intended to serve as a guide for his messengers, should they return to the mountains before the others had completed their subterranean explorations.

This duty accomplished, the boy followed his father and the rest of the party into the bowels of the earth. It was not entirely dark in the tunnel, for there was evidently some flaw in the rocky roof far overhead, through which air, and a certain amount of diffused light, filtered down.

No sound came up to Archie from the depths beneath, for the whole party that had gone on ahead was shod in soft-soled Esquimaux boots, which prevented the wearer from slipping on a frozen surface, and also rendered his footsteps noiseless.

Hurrying with due caution Archie made good going, until, at length he caught a glimpse of the beam of his father's pocket torch probing into the gloomy depths still further on. Then the light vanished as the professor turned a sudden corner, but now the whisper of voices echoed eerily back along the passage. Archie shuddered, but a moment later felt the sweat of a great fear break out upon his limbs as a terrific shout shattered the



"Caves, Archie," he chuckled.

The ascent of the first mountain range proved far more difficult than they had found it previously, for the landslides had so altered the contours of the hills that the party was, virtually, traversing *terra incognita*, but, none the less, the first cave opening was reached by midday, but, although it was deep and obviously well-suited for a place of shelter, proved as barren as a tomb in which no human remains have ever rested. Nothing daunted, however, the professor insisted upon pushing on to the exploration of a dozen other similarly empty sanctuaries. By that time the day was far spent and the Esquimaux were anxious to return to the base-camp.

Professor Brinton proved even more obstinate than usual. He felt that he was on the verge of some really great discovery, did not wish to waste valuable time in journeying to and from the camp—although there were months ahead which they would be forced to spend in the Arctic—and, in the end, half-forced and half-persuaded the Esquimaux to face the rigours of a night in one of the mountain caverns, in order that he might resume his eager search at the earliest possible hour next morning.

Before they set out, next morning Archie, unbeknown to his father, sent three of the Esquimaux back to the camp to bring up the sleeping proper igloos had been built and all was in readiness for the professor to commence his work.

For the next month the two Englishmen were busy with theodolite and chain and dumpy-level surveying and plotting the range which posterity would come to know as the Brinton Mountains. Then a blizzard swept down and for weeks on end they were forced to keep to their igloos, but the professor did not mind, from he had plenty to occupy his attention in the making of proper maps from the surveys they had plotted. Archie, however, found inactivity irksome, and urged his father to further exploration as soon as the bad weather began to clear.

To their surprise they found that the long continued storm seemed to have altered the aspect of the ranges considerably. In no case had the hard driven snow clung to the slopes of the mountains and remained stationary. Instead, great masses of the powdery stuff had accumulated until the weight had grown too great to hold its own bulk in position, when, obviously, a series of gigantic landslides had occurred; indeed, they had heard the roar of the cataclysmic descents from the security of their igloos, and, in many places, whole sections of the hills had been defaced right down to the virgin rock. In consequence, where, hitherto, had been nothing but an uninterrupted white prospect, clefts, dark chasms and yawning mouths of caves had now appeared upon the sides of the hills.

Professor Brinton rubbed his hands as his eyes rested upon those numerous dark entries.

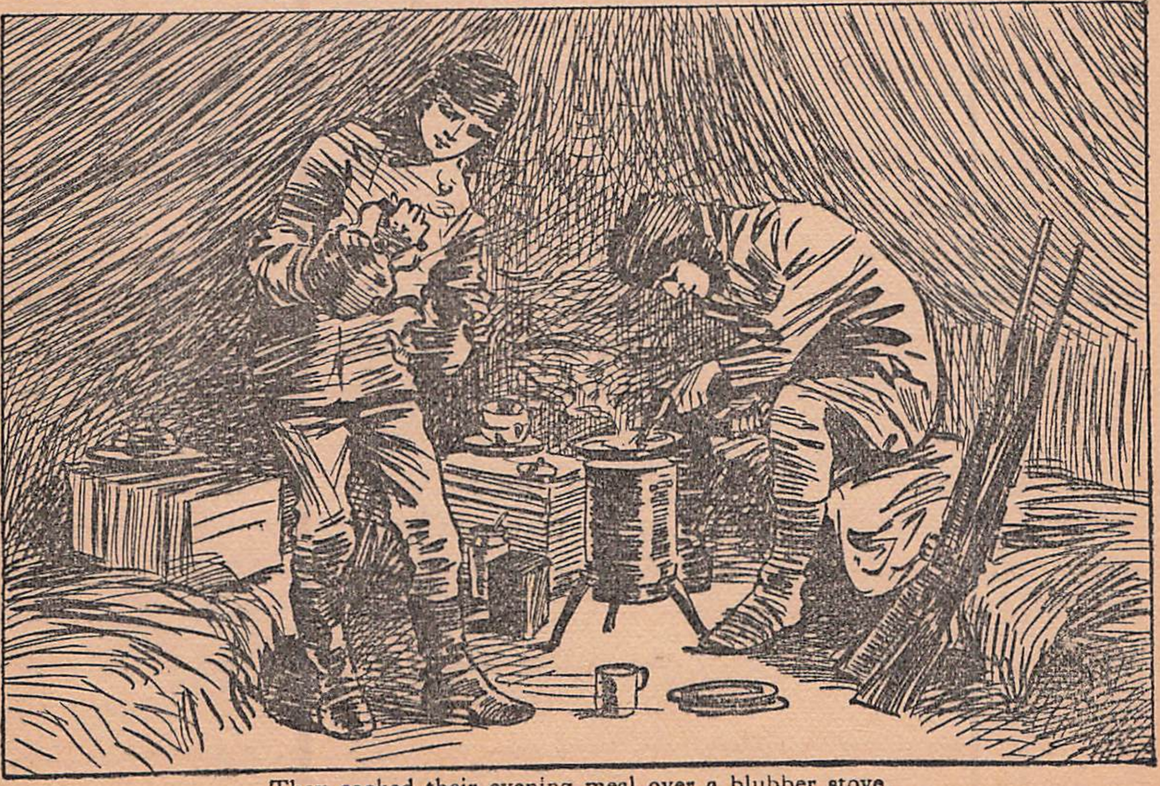
" Caves, Archie," he chuckled, clapping his son violently on the shoulder and almost dancing with excitement; " now we shall be able to get ahead, for where do you think the beasts of the Old World found shelter, if it wasn't in the caves of the mountains. To-day we commence our real work of exploration."

And so sure was the scientist of the success which he felt must be bound to attend his efforts that he insisted upon taking along with him every single soul comprising the *personnel* of his expedition. He would not agree to leave even one of the Esquimaux to look after the camp. Nor indeed, was it necessary to do so in that utterly deserted part of the earth. The dogs, however, were given an extra large meal before the party set out, and orders were given for enough food to be carried to see them through a couple of days if need be.

The day the mountains were sighted the professor went nearly mad with excitement. He had heard rumours of this range from the most uncivilised of wanderers and legend had it that a beast that had survived the Great Ice Age, but had long since become extinct in other parts of the earth, had roamed those mountains within human times. Long after the accustomed halting hour had come and gone Professor Brinton drove the expedition on towards the mountains, until the dogs were ready to drop with sheer fatique and the Esquimaux who owned the teams were showing signs of becoming openly mutinous. At last, however, Archie succeeded in persuading his parent to call a halt.

Next morning the little encampment wakened a great deal later than usual and the Esquimaux, completely rested by their long sleep, proved as cheerfully contented as ever. The dogs, however, were still foot-weary and so evening and halting time had come round again before the foothills of the high mountain range were reached.

There, despite the professor's barely suppressed impatience the whole party set methodically to work to construct a winter base, before proceeding to any further exploration. But even the longest task must have an end, and so, three days after arriving, the winter stores were safely cached,



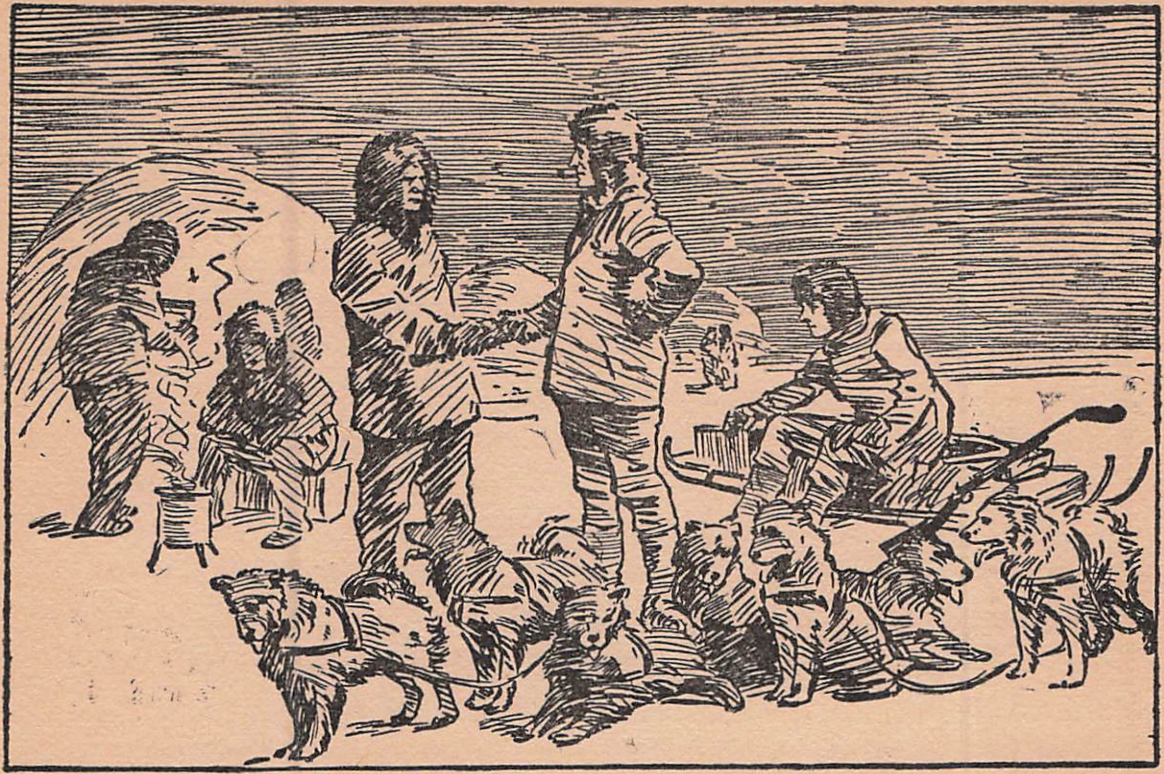
They cooked their evening meal over a blubber stove.

his explorations in Central Africa, just after the war, when many rumours prevailed regarding the survival of the Brontosaurus, and his researches in South America for Mylodon, the Giant Sloth, which was said to survive in the fastness of the Matto Grosso, had proved abortive, but previous journeyings into the Frozen North had produced what looked like clear evidence that beasts of an earlier era might still be found in the Northland, where the climatic conditions of the Ice Age still obtained. Hence the present expedition. Hence, also, the eagerness with which he questioned and cross-questioned the Esquimaux of that last outpost of even the most modified form of civilisation. It soon became evident, however, that Ayut, the tribal witch-doctor, had imposed a ban of silence upon his people; and, although he could not prevent them from taking service with the white man, he had at least the power to seal their lips. Wherefore, Professor Brinton decided to restrain his eagerness for information, while fostering his plans for further exploration.

Before setting out a week later for further explorations in the farthest North the two Englishmen enlisted the services of a dozen of the Esquimaux. When they started, utter silence and a complete stillness hemmed them in on every hand; no more than a half-light illuminated this strange world they had entered, and yet the feeling that it was entirely adequate to their needs persisted. Further than that Archie experienced keen physical pleasure when they camped at night, although there was no real darkness.

The tent they had brought with them for their own use was just big enough to accommodate Archie and his father and there, the long day's trek finished, and with snow packed high round the walls, they cooked their evening meal over a blubber stove, and afterwards talked while the fragrant smoke from the professor's pipe turned the close air to a delightful blue. Then, to creep into one's fur-lined sleeping bag and to drop off to an all-satisfying sleep in a silence that was almost tangible was only a shade less delightful than those wonderful waking moments, when one lay quite still, listening to the sizzle of the blubber stove on which a kettle was boiling for the early morning cup of tea.

Journeying and resting they went forward for the space of forty days, until they reached a strange range of uncharted mountains, which rose to vast heights, but on which no hint of rocky out-crop appeared through the sheet-like covering of ice and snow.



FOOD OF PROPHECY

PROFESSOR BRINTON and his son, Archie, had come to the last outpost of humanity in the frozen Arctic, which was represented by the cluster of igloos their dog-team was approaching.

The Esquimaux proved friendly and there was only one person in the main igloo who seemed ill-disposed. That was the tribal medicine man, Ayut, who preserved a sombre silence until the evening meal was finished, when he stretched out a skinny hand and touched the professor lightly upon the breast.

" I know what you are seeking, white-man," he said slowly. " Well, you shall find that which you seek, but you shall not bring it away with you in proof of your discovery. The Gods of the Northland shall steal your triumph from you."

Professor Brinton smiled secretly, as he thought of the arrangements he had made for a relief expedition to follow himself and Archie in the Spring.

Other scientists might maintain that the Old World was utterly dead, that nothing of former times could possibly have survived the conditions of the three great Glacial Periods and that even the mammals of the Ice Age itself were now extinct, but Professor Brinton held other views. True, The idea of making his escape immediately never entered Chalangu's head, and now, thank goodness, the humans were on the move.

Fanned right out among the trees at the far side of the open space, Jim Snow with his white friends and their pygmy allies commenced a cautious advance. Right across the sunlit glade they came and Chalangu never moved, although one black porter was so close that only the thickness of a bush separated him from the big ape.

Then the tragedy happened. The watching python had passed from branch to branch undetected, and now, with tail wrapped firmly round a bough, it dropped its coils and wound them round the unfortunate native, who was caught up and lifted in a rib-crushing constriction.

Instantly another porter drew his *panga*, as the heavy chopping knife which the natives carry is called, and sprang forward to his comrade's help. But it was the great hairy hands of Chalangu, reaching out from his place of concealment, which closed upon the body of the stupendous serpent.

Chattering with rage, the gorilla tore the snake from its hold and hurled it across the ground while the watchers, white and black, looked on dumbfounded. Then the gorilla was gone and Snow, shouting a warning to the men to stand clear, blew off the python's head with a charge from his shot-gun.

The pythoness, meanwhile, had appeared, but she also was despatched before she could do any harm.

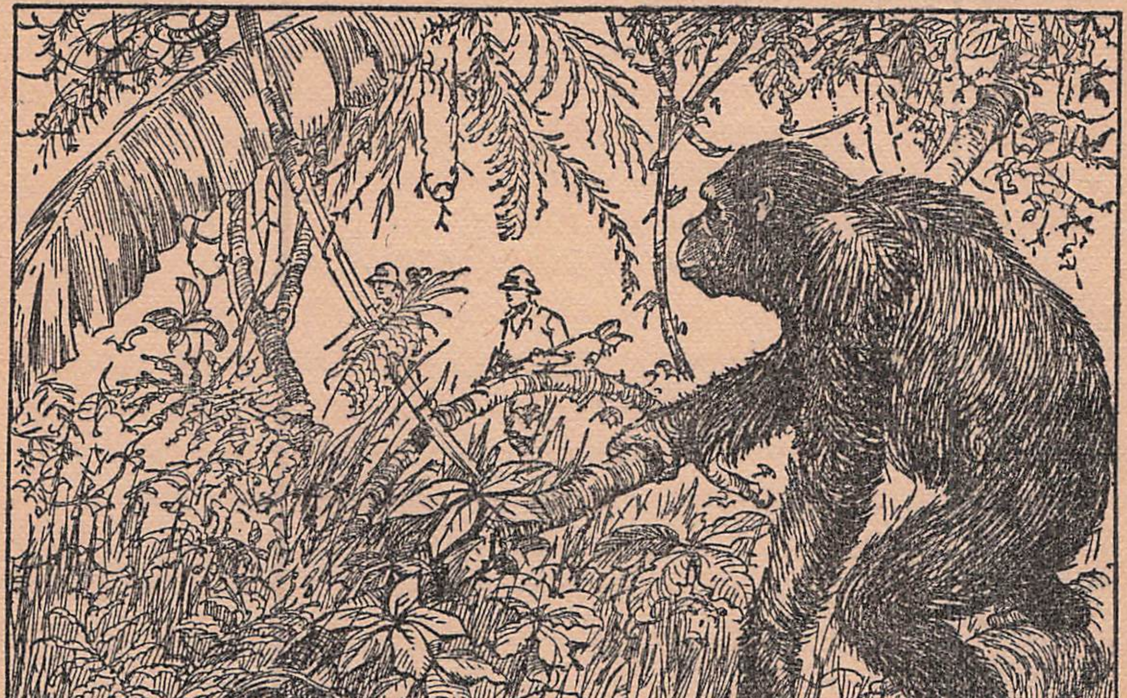
The white men removed their helmets and wiped their streaming brows, for the encounter had provided a hot five minutes while it lasted.

Chalangu, who had watched the final episode from the shelter of a thicket, departed satisfied that Matuma had now been justly revenged. No human eye caught sight of him again ; but, as the day was dying, there echoed from the cane brakes far up the mountain-side, the steady thump, thump, thump wherewith he announced his return to the family, and that satisfied triumph which comes alone from vengeance well consummated.

By the time Jim and his cameramen arrived, the clearing appeared to be completely deserted, but some instinct warned them to wait. Chalangu, peering through a leafy screen which completely hid him from view, saw the hesitation of his pursuers and tapped lightly on his breast with his clumsy great hands to produce that thump, thump, thump which experience had taught him was the one sound best calculated to entice these strange humans to continue the pursuit.

But now a new cautiousness had taken possession of the hunters, and Chalangu found himself in a quandary. If he showed himself in the clearing the white man might loose his thunder and lightning or the python might drop to the attack.

Meanwhile, he would be in no better case if he stayed where he was. At any moment the pythoness might locate his whereabouts, in which event she would at once attack him and her mate would come to her assistance, passing unseen through the leafy branches overhead.



CHALANGU PEERING THROUGH A LEAFY SCREEN.

seen something of far greater importance, for Jim Snow, despairing of filming in that forest, the gloom of which made camera work well-nigh impossible, had shot an okapi and also a forest hog for the sake of their skins and skeletons as natural history specimens.

To Chalangu, the stab of flame from the muzzle of the rifle and the loudness of the report, together with the effect on the animals, had seemed like the action of lightning and thunder, but in this case he sensed dimly that in some mysterious way the white man controlled the vital forces.

Thereafter Chalangu, greatly daring, showed himself for a brief instant in a clearing where a shaft of sunlight shot down through a gap in the canopy of trees overhead.

Jim Snow and his comrades caught their breath in a gasp of sheer wonder as the uncanny quiet was broken by a succession of terrific roars followed by a steady thump, thump, thump, and they saw in the dull green light that came filtering down a huge form, half revealed, which looked like some grotesquely horrible caricature of a human being.

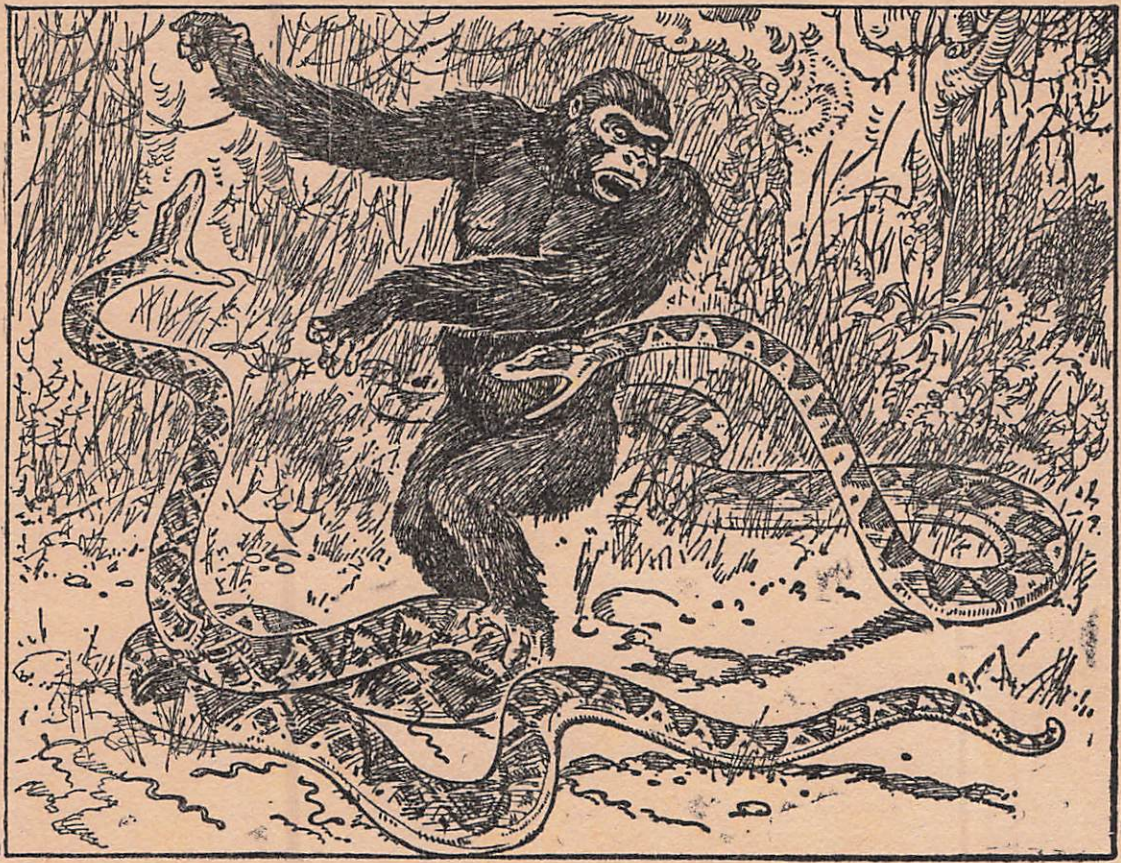
Then the surprise passed, but before ever a camera could be set up silence shut down as quickly as the falling of the curtain of tropical night. Chalangu had withdrawn as swiftly and as silently as he had appeared. The gorilla did not go far, however; he lurked in a nearby thicket to watch the men as they ran forward to take up his trail.

Thereafter the procession moved forward, the ape picking his way across damp ground which he knew would take the imprint of his enormous feet, the men following in excited expectation of overtaking him at any moment. And to lead them on Chalangu from time to time allowed them to catch a glimpse of his body covered with coarse black hair.

Those glimpses, however, were far too fleeting for a camera to be brought into action or even for a rifle to be sighted.

And so he led them on and on until he reached the part of the forest which experience had taught him that the pythons were in the habit of frequenting.

As he approached that place he decreased his speed to a slow amble, so that the men were almost on his heels when he crossed the clearing with a squattering rush. There was no sign of the pythoness, but the python lashed down from the bough of a tree, missing Chalangu by a hair's breadth as he passed underneath and gained the shelter of a thicket.



THE PYTHON ROSE ON HIS COILS.

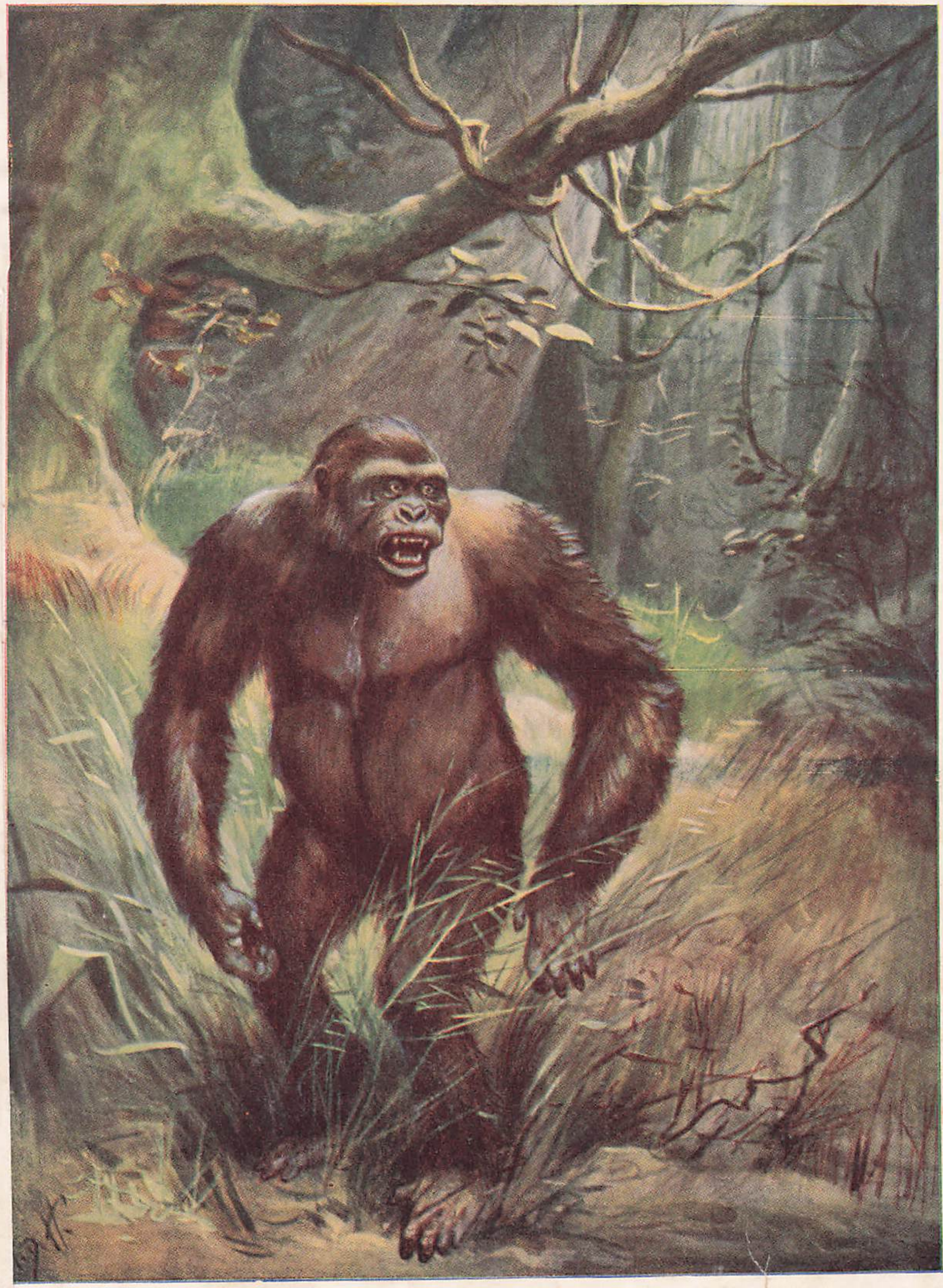
him with sledge-hammer blows from her head while he was engaged in the killing of her mate.

Once more, therefore, Chalangu drew off with his lust for vengeance for the death of Matuma unfulfilled.

Meanwhile, Jim Snow and his expedition were pushing their way slowly deeper and deeper into the heart of the Kalamba Forest, guided by Wambatti pygmies, who were not only willing to earn a reward for their services but who hoped that the white men might destroy some of the great gorillas who occasionally came down from the mountains to uproot gardens and destroy the large leafed huts in which the little people lived.

Chalangu heard the sounds of that human advance but did not retreat to the fastness of the cold green bamboo jungle, as he might well have done in the normal course of events.

He knew that these strange beings, so different in size and colour from the little pygmies to whose appearance he was accustomed, were following him, for he had seen them examining his tracks, but he had also



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